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Reading Response Guide Week 9

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RRGWk9

Character Matters: How to help our children develop good judgment, integrity, and other essential virtues. by Likona, Thomas (2004).

This book will be read quickly for the big ideas. Chapter 8 focuses on manners. What are the most important manners you would insist on students' using in your classroom. Why?

I think an important manner to insist that students use in my classroom is the Hello-Goodbye rule. It is so important that students learn that when they are greeted they should return the greeting because it is respectful, courteous, and it can change the course of someone's day. I think asking my students, "how would it make you feel if you say hello to someone and they ignored you?" I would assume many of my students would say that it would make them sad or upset. I don't think children have the capacity to think 'well maybe that person was having a bad day, ' Therefore, if someone would ignore their greeting it would genuinely affect their day. That is why it is so important that students learn that returning a greeting can change someone's mood, other than the fact that it is a respectful thing to do. It is almost as if returning a greeting is the smallest selfless act that can be incorporated into someone's day.

Chapter 7

The Ambivalence within Faith Communities.

Main idea: Hunter evaluates the different faith communities to show how they impact moral education.

Discussion

1. Why has Dobson been so effective in the evangelical community? Analyze his message.

James Dobson has been extremely successful within the evangelical community because he has intertwined moral ideas into a contemporary psychology stance. Hunter states, "Preparing for adolescence depicts self-understanding and moral action as dependent upon the categories of contemporary psychology" (Hunter, 130). Within this, Dobson has also weaved in biblical ideas and content into the foundation of contemporary psychology. His message is implicit according to Hunter, he states, "growing up requires ongoing introspection--about one's feelings of inferiority, sexual identity, problems, looks, indeed every aspect of a teenager's emotional life" (Hunter, p 130). Among this his message is that in order for adolescents to be within the scope of morality they need to be consistently developing their self-esteem and self-understanding in order to attain a sense of morality. Therefore, he has been successful in his community due to the fact that he is able to incorporate biblical ideas into a psychology foundation which can be extremely appealing to those in this community.

2. What do you think about the integration of the language and beliefs of psychology and religious instruction?

Dobson in his message uses a structure where he incorporates biblical ideas into a foundation of psychology in order to develop a sense of morality within adolescents. Hunter states, "biblically based moral standards, then, are framed within the language and concepts of popular psychology, not the other way around" (Hunter, p 131). This is what makes Dobson's message so appealing to the evangelical community. Not only is Dobson trying to create a sense of biblically sound morality within adolescents he is also trying to stress the importance of self-reflection, self-understanding, and self-esteem in the general development of an adolescent as well as the moral development. Dobson's structure as well as other structures mentioned, of incorporating biblical language into psychological ideas has made the biblical morality an easier pill to swallow. It has made it about the self rather than about a standard of right and wrong. It engages in a discussion about these ideas rather than just stating that it should be that way. Hunter states, "The premise is that psychology provides tools that are, by themselves, theologically and morally neutral but useful all the same when linked to the truths of the Christian faith" (p. 133).

Within this Dobson and this integration within language, appeals, not only to the evangelical community, but can appeal to many more.

3. What do you think the evangelical community can learn from the Jewish and Catholic communities?

The Jewish and Catholic communities differ greatly from the evangelical community due to the absence of psychological teaching within moral education. From this, the evangelical community can learn some important aspects from the Catholic and Jewish community that can be incorporated into their own views. One of the main aspects that the evangelical community can learn is to use more biblical stories within the discussion of self worth. Hunter states, “the pedagogy focuses upon stories of moral virtue...”(p. 137). By adding biblical stories into the psychological foundation adolescents can learn that Jesus is the essential role model for moral ideas as well as seeing how moral situations were handled by Him and how they can also do the same. By doing this, it helps students to see themselves as a part of the story. Hunter states, “it is in this latter challenge that young Catholics can see themselves as part of this living and unfolding narrative--as followers of Jesus”(p. 138). Therefore, this concept not only invites students into their own moral education but it stimulates their thinking about the role they play in their own lives and in the community around them.

4. How important is it to see adults modeling the behaviors expected or desired in children? How might that be true in schools?

It is very important that children see their parents engaging in and modeling the behaviors that are expected and desired in children mainly because children are creatures of imitation. They watch every single thing an adult does and takes it in like a sponge. Parents and close adults are the first role models for all children, therefore they play an important role in the development of their child, especially their moral development. Hunter quotes a story about a food program within a faith community that has the parents serving food and their children watching it, he quotes, “we want our kids to see their parents serving food to the 400 men and women who come for the meal”(p. 143). They want children to see that because it is a kind of moral gesture that includes selflessness and they know that if children see the proper behaviors and ways to live life, they will also want to do that. In schools, this concept is the same, children will imitate the behaviors the teacher presents. The fact of the matter in this question is that the child will imitate any behavior shown, which is why it is extremely important for parents and adults to be modeling the proper moral behaviors they want their children to understand and implement into their own lives.

5. Do you agree with the assessment that “Evangelical Protestantism, despite its public posturing to the contrary, is at least as comfortable with a therapeutic understanding of morality and moral development suggests once again that the resistance cultural conservatism offers to the dominant moral trends in America may, in fact, be little resistance at all?”

According to Hunter, evangelical Protestantism is less concerned with the traditional aspects of moral teaching as compared to the Jewish and Catholic communities. Hunter states, “its traditions of personal piety are less integrated into collective rituals and associations”(p. 145). Therefore, I do agree with Hunter’s assessment that the evangelical protestantism is comfortable with a therapeutic understanding of morality due to the fact that it is based on a psychological belief of the self within moral education. Hunter believes that there is nothing posing much resistance to this belief due to the fact that it is universal to all who can adopt the ideas and beliefs. It moves away from a moral standard of right and wrong and incorporates an awareness of self as the sole proprietor of moral development. This idea is not challenged because of how universal and inclusive it is.

My Question(s): Why do Christians have such a hard time adopting this idea of moral education?

Reflection

1. How has your faith community impacted your personal values?

Growing up, I belonged to a non denominational faith community which still adopted a lot of the conservative ideas to moral education. I think that the faith community I was in did not play a huge role in my moral development as much as the beliefs of my parents did. My parents had such a clear cut standard of right and wrong and implemented those ideas into every aspect of my life. My brain becomes wired to think in terms of what is right and what is wrong. Eventually this standard turned into my own personal standard of right and wrong which has not helped me much in life. Since coming to Nyack College, I think I have experienced more of a psychological view of moral education that includes free thinking along with accountability which has helped me much more than what my original faith community did.

Reaction

1. Summarize one of the views from the faith communities listed in the chapter. Give your

analysis of their approach. What is most valuable? What is least valuable?

Catholicism has a very clear cut view of moral education focusing on the biblical standard of what is right and what is wrong according to God himself and the stories depicted in the Bible. I think what is most valuable within this approach is using Jesus as the example of Christian life and love and the Holy Spirit as the helper and guide in times of temptation. What I think is the least valuable is that there is no room for wavering in these beliefs rather it is either right or wrong, black or white, with no gray areas. Catholicism is mainly based on the historical and factual teachings of the Bible, viewed as a religion not a relationship. Therefore, it seems even more so that the concepts of right or wrong are unable to be questioned because they are considered facts within this community. The idea that “it just is what it is” rather than morality being a topic of discussion, students are required to just obey. What I think is valuable in this community, only if used properly, is the incorporation of Biblical stories into moral education. This is important because children have a chance to see morality in action according to Biblical principles. Where Catholicism can go wrong with this is by avoiding discussion of the moral topics within the stories, but rather just asking clean cut text based questions and requiring students to know the facts of the story. Catholicism is truly based on traditional values of the Christian religion but has not adopted the idea of this religion as a relationship with Christ, instead.

Parting Observations

Moral education and the triumph of the therapeutic.

Main idea: Hunter maps out how morality has changed over time and how the psychological regime has provided a type of therapeutic language universal to all, which makes it difficult to find any other idea to challenge this viewpoint.

Discussion

1. Do you agree with Hunter’s summary?

I do agree with Hunter’s summary. I think it is hard to find something that challenges a concept that includes everyone and allows the individual to morally guide themselves. Hunter states, “moral education--uneven as it is-- roughly mirrors the moral culture of which it is a part”(p. 147). Therefore, due to the state of society and the culture of today it is extremely challenging to find another concept or idea of moral education that would put the psychological regime

essentially out of business. The universal and inclusive ideas of psychology as well as the control of the individual is just too appealing to those who reject the standards of right and wrong. This black and white thinking will never return in this culture due to the development and adoption of more secular ideas of the culture.

2. Should we accept these changes or try to reverse the trends?

It would almost be pointless to try and reverse the trends due to the fact that the number of people still believing in a moral standard are few and far between. The people who believe in this have now become a minority in a pool of people wanting to decide for themselves what is moral and what isn't. These people fighting for tradition would be going up an army of 32,000 with only 300 on their side. Therefore, it only makes sense to accept the changes and learn to adapt these ideas, much like Dobson's view. He incorporates Biblical language into a psychological foundation and I feel like everyone who believes in the old ways of tradition can benefit from adopting the strategy of Dobson.

3. What types of therapeutic language do you use when talking about values? Should we use it? Should we avoid it?

I think the kind of therapeutic language I use when talking about values would follow along the lines of asking how a certain moral situation makes someone feel. I think that pertaining to emotions and feelings in moral dilemmas is the type of therapeutic language I would use. Hunter states, "in a context where a range of language games, identities, and life world proliferate, a therapeutic discourse becomes our lingua franca"(p. 148). What Hunter is saying here is that this therapeutic language has become a way of communication that is universal. I think that if used properly, therapeutic language could be useful. It can help students reflect on their emotions and why they feel that way. It can encourage students to reflect on a situation and how their choices impacted the rest of their day or the consequences they experienced from that choice. The truth of morality in this society is that it isn't about punishment anymore, rather it is about evaluating how one choice can change the course of the day. It isn't about, "I can't make this choice otherwise I will get punished" rather it is "if I make this choice how will it affect the rest of the choices I will have to make today." I guess this is the kind of therapeutic language that is being used within moral education. It is no longer clean cut, but rather dependent on the individual and how they think, feel, and react to moral situations. I think that it can be helpful and truthfully it shouldn't be avoided. Asking students to reflect on themselves has so many other life benefits, and the belief here is that morality will come from this.

My Question(s): What position does Hunter take in this matter? Does he believe in the psychological regime as being a success and something we should continue to do or does he believe in the traditional concepts of morality?

Reflection

1. Develop one of Hunter's points from your own experience. Use events from your classroom and your school experience to illustrate and expand the observation he makes on progression.

In education, the concept of nature vs. nurture is commonly talked about and it is a concept in which many people sit on the fence. Is it in a child's nature to be rebellious or is it the nurture that creates them to be this way? Hunter's point of progression on the sense that children are sinful and rebellious to the sense that they are good by nature and only need encouragement, plays a huge role in the classrooms today. Looking at this concept from a Christian perspective, I can confidently say that I believe that all children are inherently good and that it is truly their experiences within their environment that create the challenging and rebellious attitudes that teachers can experience. I believe this because God created everyone with the capability to love one another. If God is inherently good, and He created us in His image then that means we were created with the intention to be inherently good. As a teacher, if I can view all my students as being inherently good, I may come across fewer cases I deem as hopeless. Most of the time, students just want to know that someone cares about them and something as simple as this can change the course of a student's life. Throughout my college education to become a teacher, I think that the pedagogy has truly shifted to believe this concept about students. To not only believe that they are educationally capable but morally capable as well, to believe that no case is hopeless and that all students deserve a chance. These are concepts that reflect this shift in the progression that Hunter states. If all teachers were to believe that their students are inherently good, and show them that they care about them in this aspect, students will begin to believe in themselves and develop a better self-esteem, which as we have learned, can help in moral development.

Reaction

Make a graphic of each of the progressions Hunter lists in this section. For example:

- Objective truth of scripture and laws of nature → conventions of a democratic society → subjective values of the individual.
- A transcendent God → the institutions of the natural order and the scientific paradigms that sustain them → to the choices of subjects

- The institutions and codes of the community → sovereign choices of the autonomous individual
- The family and local religious congregation and their youth organizations → the public school and popular culture
- The clergyman → the psychologist and the counselor
- The cultivation of a sense of good and evil through memorization of sacred texts → a largely emotive deliberation over competing values.
- The sense that children are sinful and rebellious → the sense that they are good by nature and only need encouragement.
- The mastery over the soul in service to God and neighbor → the training of character to serve the needs of civic life → the cultivation of personality toward the end of wellbeing

