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EXPLORING STUDENTS' UNDERSTANDING OF VALUES AND MORAL REASONING

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ABSTRACT

This paper discusses research conducted among distance education students at the University of Pretoria in 2009. The aim of the research was to explore moral reasoning and how it may be guided or influenced by what students regard as important values in their lives. The paper argues that being human means having the capacity to make choices and to act in accordance with the choices made. It is argued that the choices people make are based on their own personal and socially constructed values, assumptions and beliefs. This personal set of values, assumptions and beliefs informs a person's understanding of what is morally right and morally wrong, and of the type of conduct that would be just and ethical. Moral reasoning is therefore seen to be that which an individual regards as being morally right, based on a personal set of values.

In the research, an attempt was made to determine the priority given by students to certain values and how these value orientations may influence their reasoning when they are confronted with a moral dilemma. The aim of the research was to explore students' thinking and argumentation regarding moral dilemmas with a view to understanding how students – who are all practising teachers – take moral decisions. Although the study will run over a number of years, some preliminary findings of a survey undertaken in June 2009 are discussed, indicating some of the initial trends emerging from the data.

Keywords: moral reasoning, moral dilemmas, teachers, values, value education, value orientation

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INTRODUCTION

Why is it that, even though people know what is right, they continue to do what is wrong? Why is it that even though educators know that they should not have sexual relationships with learners, some still choose to have such relationships? This question has intrigued me for many years. In training school leaders, I learned two important lessons early on in my career: first, that theory and practice do not always agree; and secondly, that morally right and morally wrong may not be as fixed as what we often assume them to be. Let me illustrate this with an example.

In 2004, I conducted research using reflective journaling to analyse the daily work life and decisions taken by school managers (Nieuwenhuis, 2008). The data collected revealed a diverse range of challenges faced by rural school principals and illustrated how often principals acted differently to what common management theory would describe as being appropriate. Secondly, it revealed how morally right and morally wrong may differ, depending on one's own understanding of what people "ought to do".

In one case, the principal, in his reflective journal entry on the Monday, told the story of a learner in the school who had passed away that morning. For many African people, life – and life beyond the grave – dictates human behaviour (Mazrui, 1986). For a whole school week, the major part of the reflective journal entries talked about how the principal had devoted his time to arrange the memorial service and funeral for the deceased learner. This is not an isolated incident, but common practice in many of the more traditionally oriented rural schools in South Africa. According to custom, it is believed that the parents should be given the opportunity to grieve while the community or school steps in to make the arrangements for the funeral. On the Friday, the memorial service was held at the school. A big tent was put up on the school premises, as the school had no school hall, and all the chairs in the school were moved to the tent. On the Friday, the community came to the school to prepare food for the memorial service and for the funeral that was to be held on the Saturday. As a result, there was no schooling on the Friday or the Monday, when everything had to be returned to the classes.

Apart from anything else, this story raises the question whether the principal's conduct was morally right or whether it should be judged as being morally wrong, based on Western concepts of school management. From a management theory perspective, what the principal and the school did does not adhere to notions of best practice in terms of what one "ought to do".

Looking at the scenario from a traditional African perspective, however, the actions of the principal and the school met the requirements of the traditional things that one "ought to do". As stated earlier, for traditionally oriented African people, life – and life beyond the grave – determines human behaviour. Mazrui (1986) explains that for those in Africa who believe in the power of the ancestors, not paying the necessary respect to those who depart from this world will bring the anger of the ancestors over one. This link between the living and the ancestors is taken for granted in African communities, and it must be understood in terms of the notion of *ubuntu* – "I am human because you are human". Associated with this is the idea that a child is the child of the community and that the school should therefore step in, not only to make its facilities available, but also to help provide funds for the cost of a funeral.

Although such a line of argumentation may explain the example given, it does not present us with a finite answer. Does this line of reasoning, for example, propose that culture alone could act as the lens through which one could define what is morally right or morally wrong?

The film *A reasonable man* tells the story of a young man of 18 who stood accused of murder in the first degree. He had pick-axed a toddler of three to death. In the film, the advocate for the defence argued that the hut in which the murder took place was dark and the accused did not know that this little child was sleeping in the hut. When he saw the rug moving, he did not know that the child had pulled the rug over her and was trying to free herself. All he thought was that it must be a *tokoloshe* (an evil spirit) and he did the only brave thing a man could do and hit out at the spirit to kill it. Talking about the film, the producer, Gavin Hood (as quoted in *Daily Dispatch,* 1999), said: "One man's religion is another's superstition. It is easier to prove reasonable behaviour than reasonable belief, as it is such a personal concept." The film is based on the case R v Mbombela (1933 AD 269 at 272), which established the objective principle of a reasonable man. In this case, the judge argued that "[a] reasonable belief, in my opinion, is such as would be formed by a reasonable man in the circumstances in which the accused was placed in a given case". This principle has been followed repeatedly in numerous cases, as was the case in the Constitutional Court case of S v Manamela and Mdlalose (CCT 25/99). The Constitutional Court argued that in S v Van As, Rumpff CJ (1976 (2) SA 921 (A) at 928 C – E), the origin and application of the frequently invoked standard of the "careful head of a family", the *diligens paterfamilias,* was also explained. Rumpff CJ stated:

In our law since time immemorial we have used the diligens paterfamilias *as someone who in specified circumstances would behave in a certain way. What he would do is regarded as reasonable. We do not use the* diligentissimus [*excessively careful*] paterfamilias, *and what the* diligens paterfamilias *would have done in a particular case must be determined by the judicial officer to the best of his ability. This* diligens paterfamilias *is, of course, a fiction and is also, all too often, not a* pater [*father*]. *In the application of the law, he is viewed 'objectively', but in essence he must apparently be viewed both 'objectively' and 'subjectively' because he represents a particular group or type of persons who are in the same circumstances as he is, with the same ability and knowledge. If a person therefore does not foresee what the other people in his group, in fact, could and would have foreseen, then that element of* culpa, *that is failure to foresee, is present.*

The court, therefore, argues that the test for reasonableness, of course, remains objective. What is reasonable will, however, be construed in the circumstances in which the accused in a particular case finds himself or herself. If this argument stands, then one could apply the same type of argument to social values and moral reasoning. Although it may offer some provisional acid test, it does not really fully resolve the dilemma in a diverse society where different cultural sets of morality operate. For this reason, the research that I will discuss in this paper looks at the values that students reported are important to them and how they argue about a moral dilemma.

RESEARCH QUESTION

Contrary to international experience, very little empirical research has been conducted on values and moral education in the South African context. For the most part, it has remained more of a philosophical debate at a conceptual level, often borrowing from research done abroad or based on anecdotal evidence. Given the emphasis placed on moral regeneration in South Africa and the urge for schools to assist in this regard, the Faculty of Education at the university where I work, in collaboration with the South African Department of Education, developed an Advanced Certificate in Education (ACE) in Values and Human Rights in Education in 2003. This later developed into a BEd(Hons) module called Managing Values and Human Rights in Education. Much of the content of the ACE and the BEd(Hons) module is based on the *Manifesto on values, human rights and democracy in education* (2002), published by the South African Department of Education, as well as on international literature and empirical research data and trends. Although these served an invaluable purpose,

they remained sterile in terms of locally produced research insights. For this reason, it is essential to conduct research into the values of students and how they argue about moral dilemmas so as to enhance our own understanding of the student population. Such an understanding would enable us to align our training during contact sessions to the unique understandings and value frameworks of students.

The research is premised on the assumption that people are not born with a complete set of values or morals. We may be born with the genetic potential to attach greater importance to certain values than to others, but in the end we learn and develop a value system based on our interaction with the natural world, with people, with thoughts, feelings and ideas. We are not passive recipients of the values of our ancestors, but **active creators** of our own set of values, which is related to that of our forbearers; yet our set of values is unique. As stated by McLean (1991), a person's values reflect his or her culture and heritage, as well as what he or she has done with the set of values handed down to him or her. Bull (1969) explains this point as follows:

> "The child is not born with a built-in moral conscience. But he is born with those natural, biologically purposive capacities that make him potentially a moral being."

As we grow older and mature, we begin to impart unique personal meaning to the values and principles that underpin the rules that we have learned to obey. As we impart meaning to different things, rules and behaviour, we organise the values into a specific abstract internalised structure called our value system and begin to develop the ability to take decisions that are congruent with our value system. Straughan (1992) argues that "what determines the level of moral development a person is at is not the particular action he judges to be right or wrong, but his reasons for so judging". This implies that in considering the actions of people, we must make allowance for social cognition and moral reasoning. Knowing right from wrong is more than a simple process of being aware of specific social rules, and doing the right thing is not a simple matter of putting those rules into practice.

The research therefore sets out to answer the following key research questions:
- What are the important values in the lives of our students?
- What content and understanding is given to these values?
- How do these values impact on their moral understanding and reasoning?

- What factors do they consider in solving moral dilemmas?
- To what extent are they willing to negotiate and/or sacrifice their moral standpoints?

THEORETICAL UNDERSTANDINGS THAT UNDERPIN THE STUDY

Being human means having the capacity to make choices and to act in accordance with the choices made. The choices we make are based on our own personal and socially constructed values, assumptions and beliefs. This personal set of values, assumptions and beliefs informs our understanding of what is morally right and morally wrong and of the type of conduct that would be just and ethical. It should be obvious from our earlier discussion that what is right and what is wrong are not absolute truths that are written into some convention or eternally valid declaration. Right and wrong are socially negotiated and mediated and therefore unstable. They have to be rediscovered, reinvented and redefined by each generation as it searches for a way to make living together more just and equitable. This does not mean that there are no normative principles on which right or wrong are based, but that the specific content imparted in these normative principles is relative to the specific spatio-temporality of the person or group. This makes any global notion of morally right or wrong highly problematic.

Secondly, I accept that all human beings are equally capable of doing what is right as they are of doing what is wrong. Nussbaum (1999) asserts the following:

> *…that all, just by being human, are of equal dignity and worth, no matter where they are situated in society, and that the primary source of this worth is a power of moral choice within them, a power that consists in the ability to plan a life in accordance with one's own evaluations of ends.*

Taking a decision is partly based on the education (enculturation) people receive at home, in school and in society, and partly on their inherited propensity towards certain kinds of behaviour; but mostly, it is based on their own personal experiences and the meanings they have attached to notions of right or wrong. In other words, decisions about right or wrong are socially constructed ideas of what they "ought to do" (the morally right). However, acting in accordance with that idea is not predetermined. Instead, it is actively chosen. Even the most morally corrupt person among us can at times do what is right, and even the most moral person can at times choose to do what is wrong.

Lickona (1991) points out the need to distinguish between moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behaviour, i.e. habits of the mind, habits of the heart and habits of action. Lickona claims that all three are necessary for leading a moral life, as all three make up moral maturity. Moral knowing is described as involving moral awareness, values, perspective taking, moral reasoning and decision-making. Moral feeling includes the conscience, self-esteem, empathy and humility. Finally, moral action is founded on moral competence (the ability to turn moral judgment and feeling into action), moral will (the desire to do what is right) and moral habit (an unconscious inclination to do what is right). Lickona (1991) views moral action as an "outcome" of both moral knowing and moral feeling. The moral environment in which individuals are situated is viewed as a key factor that determines whether people behave morally.

For Hale-Haniff and Pasztor (1999), values refer to the sense that something is or is not important (worth striving for or desirable). They contrast this to beliefs, which they define as assumptions, convictions, rules or expectations about life, people and ideas. Hale-Haniff and Pasztor (1999) claim that we only tend to hold beliefs about things that *matter* to us, i.e. we formulate beliefs in the light of that which we value. Viewed from this perspective, beliefs not only include philosophical assumptions or convictions about whether or not one's life has overall meaning or purpose, but also rules and expectations about life, people and ideas.

Accepting that a value is something worth living or striving for foregrounds two fundamental aspects of a value: cognition (what I think or believe) and feeling (what I feel/my emotions). Values are, however, not restricted to these two aspects, as they are mediated by a variety of other variables (place, circumstance, opportunity) so that the relation is not direct and certainly not isomorphic (Berkowitz, 1995). Certainly, a value entails cognition (knowing), for a value is centrally a belief in the desirability or lack of desirability of the focus of the value. It also includes emotion (feeling), as it is by its very nature affectively laden (Nieuwenhuis, 2005, 2007, Manual, 1994). Hale-Haniff and Pasztor (1999) state that our emotional responses provide cues that one or more of our (conscious or unconscious) expectations are being violated. For example, when someone else has violated an important belief or expectation, feelings of disappointment, anger or hurt often ensue. Because these emotions serve as signals of unmet expectations, they can serve as catalysts for identifying unconscious expectations or beliefs. In this regard, Rokeach (1973) claims that values guide, but do not necessarily predict behaviour. It is easy to reject drugs in the safe environment of the classroom, but it becomes a much more complex decision in the club when one's peers are using drugs.

Against this background, the study draws its theoretical conceptualisation from Satir's Growth Model and Csikszentmihaly's Model of Optimal Experience, as discussed by Hale-Haniff and Pasztor (1999), infusing these with the ideas of Lickona (1991).

Satir approaches the understanding of consciousness from a holistic perspective in which she translates the awareness of wholeness (which is largely a fixed, spatial metaphor) into temporal form, expressed through the infinite continuity or flowing movement of attention. Her concept of "congruence" (also see Kohlberg, 1975) refers to holistic patterns of consciousness in which attention flows freely and continuously (Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999). When all bits of information in consciousness are congruent with each other, there is flow, and the quality of experience is optimal. When the bits of information conflict, the attention pattern becomes blocked or repetitive, and experience is painful. Satir attended to congruence or lack of congruence at multiple simultaneous levels: values, intention, attention and behaviour.

Diagram I: Relationships among the subsystems of congruent subjective experience (Hale-Haniff & Pasztor: 1999)
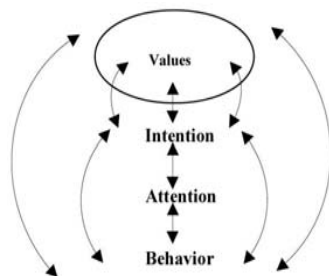
One could apply the notion of flow and congruence to the thinking of Csikszentimihaly. Csikszentimihaly (in Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999) studied experience (or flow states) in hundreds of individuals as they engaged in many different activities. From the work of Satir and Csikszentimihaly, an isomorphic relationship between the pattern and structure of flow states, and Satir's description of congruence can be identified. Both refer to the interrelationships *among* the subsystems of values, goal-setting or intention, attention, emotion and behaviour. Diagram I summarises the relationships among these subsystems of subjective experience. The thinking underpinning Diagram 1 could also be linked to Lickona's idea of moral knowing, moral feeling and moral behaviour, i.e. habits of the mind, habits of the heart and habits of action, and to Kohlberg's idea of moral development.

Csikszentmihaly provides clear and useful descriptions of the relationship between values, intention, attention and emotion. **Values** are the major arbiter of choice. What we value is pervasively reflected across all aspects of consciousness: in our implicit and explicit choices, philosophical orientation and rules to live by, the nature of our expectations and assumptions, decision-making, means of motivation, prioritisation of goals, choices about what we attend to and how we behave. **Intention** or goal-setting is the force that keeps experience ordered. Goals or intentions, which may be immediate, short or long range, are assigned many levels of priority, ranging from trivial to vital. **Attention** refers to what will or will not appear in consciousness – what we notice internally and externally. At any given moment, we have at our disposal many individual units of attention, which may be usefully categorised as auditory, visual and kinaesthetic in nature. **Behaviour** is how we act (what we do, what we say, how we say it and our body language).

An unconflicted or unified intent presupposes clearly prioritised values, supported by compatible or unconflicted assumptions and in patterns of attention where people are predisposed to notice that which is congruent with their personal goals. This alignment of values, intention and attention supports those emotions and behaviours that are congruent with personal goals. On the other hand, conflicted or split intentions presuppose unprioritised values and/or conflicting beliefs, which result in patterns of attention that include both relevant and irrelevant stimuli, and are accompanied by mixed emotions and inconsistent or dissonant behaviours.

According to Csikszentmihaly (1990), "Flow helps to integrate the self because in that state of deep concentration consciousness is usually well ordered. Thoughts, intentions, feelings and all the senses are focused on the same goal". Negative emotions, like boredom, anxiety or fear, produce a state from which people are not able to use attention to effectively deal with external tasks. Instead, they must turn their attention inwards to restore order.

Based on the ideas of Satir, Csikszentmihaly, and Hale-Haniff and Pasztor, it is assumed that when people are confronted with a moral dilemma, the natural flow is interrupted and attention is focused on that which creates disequilibrium, thus requiring them to turn their attention inwards to resolve the incongruence experienced. In order to do this, they need to reflect on their held values, assumptions and beliefs to be able to formulate a stance that will help them restore congruence and flow. It is this process of inward reasoning that this study sets out to investigate and explore to gain greater insight and understanding about students' moral reasoning.

RESEARCH DESIGN

Methodology

The theoretical framework presented is aimed at understanding the interplay between values and moral reasoning by focusing on flow states (see Satir, Csikszentmihaly, Hale-Haniff & Pasztor and Lickona). Based on this, a combination of quantitative and qualitative data-gathering methods was used. A concurrent mixed method design using a single data-gathering instrument was employed. The aim was to establish the possible value orientations and personal value structure of individual students and, based on this, to explore how they reason about moral dilemmas. To do this, students were required to complete a section containing multiple-choice and ranking questions to provide us with an individualised value structure per student. A separate section of the questionnaire required students to complete open-ended questions in which they were confronted with a number of moral dilemmas. The purpose of the dilemmas was to create some form of incongruence in their flow state, which required some inward reflection and reasoning to restore flow. This reasoning process would be captured in text in the questionnaire and would be subjected to an empirical hermeneutic phenomenological analysis.

In order to verify the possible influence that group norming might have had, students were given the opportunity to discuss the moral dilemmas after they had completed the questionnaire. A moderator facilitated the flow of the discussion without pronouncing any moral judgment, but could ask questions for clarification and probing purposes. The moderator took field notes, which captured the main arguments raised and discussed. After discussion, students were given the opportunity to add to or change any aspect pertaining to a specific moral dilemma if they so wished. Space was provided on the questionnaire where these afterthoughts could be added.

Sampling

All students enrolled for the distance education module OWB 781 of the BEd (Honours) degree in Education Management who attended the July 2009 contact sessions were invited to participate. Approximately 900 students from all nine provinces usually attend these sessions, which increased the possible transferability of the findings. The existing contact teaching programme makes provision for a discussion of values and morals on the second day of the contact session and this study simply replaced that lecture. For the purpose of this contribution, the responses of only one group attending the session in Pretoria will be discussed. The participants were from the Gauteng province and could be regarded as coming from mainly urban settings.

Data analysis

Although the first section of the questionnaire was designed in such a way that item analysis might be undertaken to develop measures of reliability and validity, and so that inferential statistical methods might be employed to standardise each question, these advanced statistical procedures were not used in the preparation of this paper, as this will only be done after all the questionnaires have been returned. Based on the findings of the study, it is foreseen that the questionnaire will be refined and adjusted to allow for possible standardisation in the future. Such a process will greatly enhance the validity and reliability of the instrument, but may detract from the focus of the study vis-à-vis the moral reasoning of students. In terms of the data gathered in the quantitative section of the questionnaire, a basic statistical analysis was undertaken to determine individual student value preferences, from which a tentative value structure for the group could be inferred. This step in the research process was needed to establish a provisional framework of students' value orientations. The variables included in the biographical section of the questionnaire may be used in future for secondary data analysis to identify trends within subgroupings in the data set.

A total of 51 questionnaires were received from the first group. With the exception of one, they all claimed to be Christian in religious orientation and, with the exception of two, were all of African origin, speaking one of the nine African languages pronounced as official languages in South Africa. Two-thirds of the participants were female and a third were male (refer to Table 1), which is typical of the gender distribution of educators. More mature students generally enrol for postgraduate studies and this fact is reflected in the data, which indicates that more than 80% of the participants were middle-aged (refer to Table 2).

Table 1: Gender distribution

Gender	Number
Male	17
Female	34

Table 2: Age distribution

Age	Number
<30	2
31–40	16
41–50	25
>50	8

FINDINGS

VALUE STRUCTURE

Section A explored the value orientations of the students. The section consisted of two parts. In the first multiple-choice part, students were given a question with three possible choices from which they had to choose the one that corresponded best with their own preference. The three alternatives posed for each question represented a specific value. A values key index was developed that enabled weighting of the 12 values measured. Three opposites were formulated to check for consistency in the response pattern. In the second part, ten values were listed in alphabetical order, which participants had to rank in terms of personal preference. The results are reflected in Figure 1 and Diagram 2.

Figure 1: Distribution of participants according to weighted values
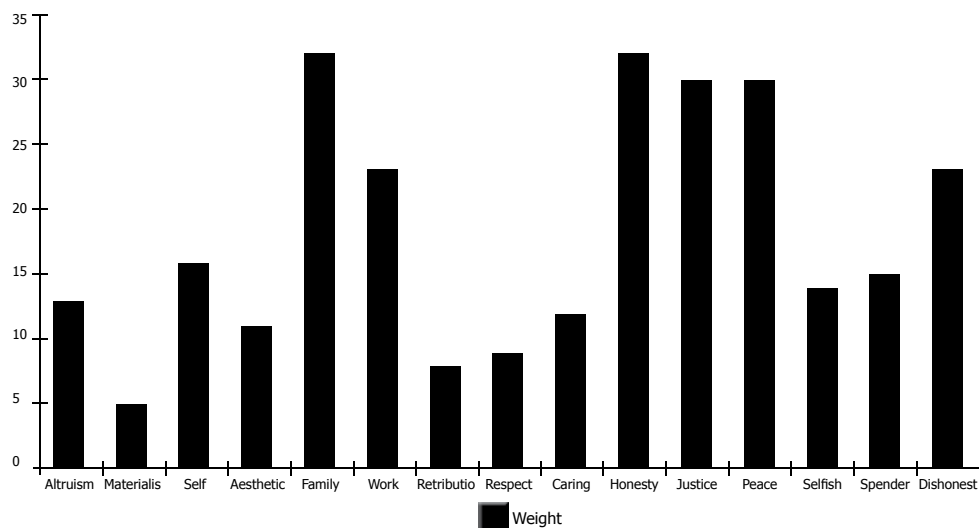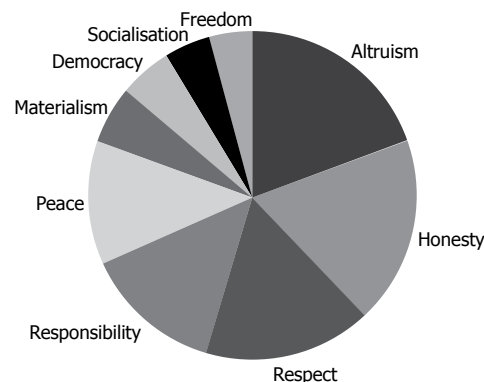

Diagram 2: Rank order of values

A clear pattern emerged from the data obtained (see Figure 1). Values regarding family (communalism), honesty, social justice and peace were identified as important. At the same time, dishonesty and self-interest were rejected. Communalism (altruism), honesty, respect, accountability and peace were also ranked high as values. This must be regarded as preliminary.

MORAL DILEMMAS

The main focus of the research was on the moral reasoning of students. This was contained in Section B of the questionnaire. Students were given five moral dilemmas in narrative form, followed by a number of open-ended questions. Only one of these dilemmas will be discussed in this contribution.

A similar approach to that of Blatt and Kohlberg (1975) served as the basis for these moral dilemma discussions. The Blatt-Kohlberg method of inducing cognitive conflict uses Piaget's equilibration model as a basis, but could also be aligned with the idea of *flow,* as discussed in Satir's Growth Model and Csikszentmihaly's Model of Optimal Experience (Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999). The basic argument is that a person takes one view, becomes confused by discrepant information, and then resolves the confusion by forming a more advanced and comprehensive position. Asking thoughtful questions play an important role in inducing students' higher-level cognitive processes, such as self-reflection, revision, social negotiation and conceptual change of misconceptions, all of which are integral to critical thinking and moral reasoning.

Before presenting the moral dilemma and the emerging pattern of responses, it is important to make a number of observations regarding the importance of communalism in African culture (Nieuwenhuis & Goolam, 2009) as a possible lens through which the moral dilemma could be analysed.

Communalism could be linked to the African idea of humanism or *ubuntu* and its essence is to ensure the welfare and interests of each individual member of society. *Ubuntu* has been translated to denote a feeling of common humanity, a spirit of humaneness, social justice and fairness. It refers to the art of being a human being and includes a number of virtues, such as tolerance, compassion and forgiveness. It emphasises the value of human dignity and expresses the idea that a person's life is only meaningful if he or she lives with other people, nature, the divine spirits and the ancestors. *Ubuntu* advances the idea of individual human rights to include the concepts of community/communalism and the co-existence of rights and duties. *Ubuntu* should, in addition, be understood in terms of African ontology. The hierarchical nature of African ontology places the Supreme Being at the apex and the world of natural objects, and phenomena at the bottom. African ontology is essentially spiritualistic. In this regard, ancestors and their influence over and connectedness to the living is accepted (Mazrui, 1986). Religion permeates all areas of life and it is not possible to isolate it from the other areas. Morality is inextricably linked with religion, but the main determining force in morality is harmony. At a psychological level, this finds expression in a sense of a "reciprocal we-ness" and emotional care for others, and – at a volitional level – through helping others (Metz, 2008). The essential rationale of communalism is that it indicates the value of collective action, mutual aid and interdependence as necessary conditions for the successful achievement of even the most difficult undertakings. Communalism puts forward the idea that the good of all determines the good of each, or that the welfare of each is dependent on the welfare of all.

The moral dilemma presented to participants, which forms the basis of the further discussion and analysis, was the following:

> The Grade 10 class at your school wanted to go to Maropeng (Cradle of Humankind). The school principal promised them that they could go if they collected enough money to pay for the trip. The class worked very hard selling sweets and food at the school, and collecting money from the community. In the end they collected R4 000, which would pay for the trip, and a little more besides. But, a few days before the planned trip, one of the Grade 12

learners passed away. The school principal started to arrange the funeral and decided to use the money collected by the Grade 10s for the funeral. So, he told the Grade 10s that he would use the money for the funeral and that they would not be going to Maropeng any more. The Grade 10s were very disappointed, thinking of how hard they had to work to get the money.

The students were confronted by a moral dilemma and had to decide on three issues:

- Whether a sense of communalism should take precedence over their sense of social justice (communalism ←→ individualism)
- Whether a person in authority may use his or her power to take a decision (authoritarianism ←→ democracy)
- The moral principles of the relationship between the principal and the learners

Eight open-ended questions were posed to explore the three dimensions listed. From the responses, it was clear that students saw the scenario as a moral dilemma. The majority of responses (39 out of 51) gave strong indications of communalist thinking. Even in cases where they felt that the principal had no right to use the money, their sense of communalism was aroused. Typical responses included: "*Ubuntu* must take its part"; schoolchildren had to "sympathise with their principal and schoolmate"; they had to "...go to the funeral and show care and value for human life"; and "the important thing is to attend funeral" and "I will remind learners of things that we do not have control over".

Many felt that the funeral was a deserving cause and that even the unilateral decision of the principal to use the money for the funeral could be excused. Participants, for example, said: "The principal has no right, only the situation made him do that" and "[the] money is used for a good cause and they can raise more money, but the dead body cannot be kept any longer"; "the life of a person is more important than personal or social things"; "what matters now is the fact that, since there will be a funeral for one of the pupils, the money for the funeral is available"; and "[they can] postpone the trip and donate their money for the funeral because it is a good thing to do".

It is, of course, possible that urbanised people may have lost their traditional values and beliefs, and, through their exposure to Western cultural influences, have adopted a more individualistic or self-centred stance. If the latter is the case, then it was expected that participants would see the actions of the principal sketched

in the scenario as wrong and unjust. Examples of self-centred thinking were found on 25 occasions in the responses of participants. In essence, the argument was that "The money was not for the funeral"; "the school is not a burial society and the money was collected for the trip"; "it is not their responsibility to bury that learner"; and "the learners worked very hard to collect the money for that particular purpose (trip)".

From the responses received, it became evident that the use of the money for the funeral was not seen as such a moral dilemma, but what generated a lot of attention was the fact that the principal used the money without consulting the Grade 10 learners. This action of the principal challenged their sense of justice and democracy. Firstly, they viewed the money as belonging to the learners and, secondly, they felt that the learners must have a voice and a choice in the matter. Participants said: "...he should have asked the Grade 10s' opinion first before he made the final decision" and "the principal had no right, but needed to explain the situation and negotiate with learners and allow learners to take the decision", while other participants explained: "There must be a mutual understanding and equal sharing of ideas" and "the learners should make their choice about their money."

The fact that the principal used the money without consulting with the learners was seen as an act of disrespect. One participant explained: "He doesn't have the right to use it without the permission of the learners. He shows that he doesn't respect them" and "...their effort and commitment should be respected too". *Respect* emerged strongly as a common theme. Participants felt that the principal had to keep his promise, since being true to your promise ensures that people will respect you. One participant claimed that "they [the children] will recognise that their rights are being respected and behave well", while another said that "...[w]hen learners see that the principal respects them, they will in return respect him". Linked with the theme of respect is *trust* and *fidelity*. Trust and fidelity were closely associated with the importance of keeping a promise. This is illustrated by the following statements of participants:

- "A promise kept building a trust among people; it is therefore important to share the same feeling."
- "A good relationship takes time to be rebuilt when it is broken."
- "The learners should trust the principal and respect what he says."
- "That the learners trust him and have faith in him and that he/she should treat them well and respect them."

- "A promise is an obligation."
- "As a man in authority, you cannot go back on your word due to unforeseen circumstances."
- "It makes you to walk your talk and makes you trustworthy."

The high premium attached to fidelity and the importance of keeping a promise corresponds with the importance attached to honesty as a value (see Figure 1 and Diagram 2) and affirms the consistency of the response pattern in the respondent group.

CONCLUSION

South Africa is now in its second decade of democracy. For the generation now entering high school, *apartheid* and the liberation struggle are presumed to be a history lesson, but what they see around them is a society that has not yet transformed. They see adults caught in a cultural discontinuity of not being able to fully identify with traditional culture any more and who are not fully embracing a type of modernist or universalistic culture. In the words of the Afrikaans poet, WEG Louw, "*a halfway up the hill stand*". This tendency is corroborated in the moral dilemma discussed. The traditional way expects them to honour and respect the dead and to act in a way that will harmonise the group and ensure communalism. At the same time, they want to embrace the more self-centred and individualistic stance of having a fun day. Or they want to act in a way they see as being morally right, i.e. to be honest and to honour a promise made. In arguing through the moral dilemma, we see many of the participants move between these choices.

The Blatt-Kohlberg (1975) idea of inducing cognitive conflict or disturbing the flow (Hale-Haniff & Pasztor, 1999) was created through the moral dilemma posed. In arguing through the dilemma, it would appear as if Csikszentmihaly's notion of the relationship between values, intention, attention and emotion could serve as a basis for the interpretation of the reasoning. If we accept that **values** are the major arbiter of choice, then it is insightful to note the dominance attached to trust, respect and honesty when the participants considered the scenario sketched and how feelings of altruism (communalism) permeated their reasoning. It would thus appear that the theoretical framework developed for the study could be used to further explore and analyse the data obtained in the study.

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