

Challenges and possibilities for values education in Brazil: Lessons from some school experiences

Desafios e possibilidades para a educação em valores no Brasil: Lições de algumas experiências escolares

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Como citar: GASPER, Des; MACEDO DE JESUS, Anderson. Challenges and possibilities for values education in Brazil: Lessons from some school experiences. *Revista de Filosofia Aurora*, Curitiba: Editora PUCPRESS, v. 37, e202532361, 2025. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1590/2965-1557.037.e202532361>.

Abstract

The Vatican's Global Compact on Education attempts to foster understanding of existential interconnectedness and to promote human solidarity. This is not straightforward, for humanity is an evolutionary product of inter-group struggles, and the predominant current values worldwide are

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often unfavourable. Further, many historical, cultural and institutional inheritances in a country like Brazil are particularly problematic. Much work explores possibilities in university-level education to promote the sorts of objective declared in the Global Compact. However, wide impact requires initiatives within mass schooling systems. The main part of this paper thus looks at two experiments in education for values, in primary and secondary schools in Brazil: an attempt to reach large numbers of children at low cost via an online game that raises value questions for discussion; and a smaller-scale experiment in infusing values-awareness into not only specific curricular modules but also overall school operation.

Keywords: Global Compact on Education. Values. Education. Curriculum.

Resumo

O Pacto Global sobre Educação do Vaticano tenta promover a compreensão da interconexão existencial e a promoção da solidariedade humana. Isto não é simples, pois a humanidade é um produto evolutivo de questões intergrupais e os valores correntes predominantes em todo o mundo são muitas vezes desfavoráveis. Além disso, muitas heranças históricas, culturais e institucionais num país como o Brasil são particularmente problemáticas. Muitos trabalhos exploram possibilidades no ensino de nível superior para promover os tipos de objetivos declarados no Pacto Global. No entanto, o amplo impacto requer iniciativas dentro dos sistemas de ensino básico. A parte principal deste artigo analisa, portanto, duas experiências em educação para valores em escolas de ensino fundamental e médio no Brasil: uma delas tenta alcançar um grande número de crianças a baixo custo por meio de um jogo online que promove questões ligadas à valores humanos para discussão; e a segunda experiência, em menor escala, tenta promover a consciência de valores não apenas em módulos curriculares específicos, mas também no funcionamento geral da escola.

Palavras-chave: Pacto Educativo Global; valores; educação; currículo.

1. THE AMBITIONS OF THE GLOBAL COMPACT

The Vatican's 2019 Global Compact on Education attempts to apply the philosophical vision of Pope Francis's 2015 encyclical *Laudato Si'* to the fields of education, understood as essential media for societal change. The encyclical cited Principle 1 of the Rio-1992 treaty, that "human beings are at the centre of concerns for sustainable development" (p. 123). It diagnosed that "what is really in crisis is our way of understanding reality and of relating to one another" and argued "how inseparable the bond is between concern for nature, justice for the poor, commitment to society, and interior peace" (p. 10). It called for "new horizons in which hospitality, intergenerational solidarity and the value of transcendence can give birth to a new culture" (from: Pope Francis video message on the Global Compact on Education, 15.10.2020, cited in CCE, p. 23).

Market-dominated society fosters existential emptiness that sustains frenetic consumerism and contributes to "the abandonment of the most vulnerable, and [to] attacks on nature", argued Pope Francis (2015: 66). Education must add awareness that "by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion" (p. 82). It needs to promote "gratitude" for living in a (potentially) bountiful world (p. 160) and an understanding that often 'less is more'.

The Global Compact declares the needs then for "an educational process aimed at developing a new universal solidarity and a more welcoming society", and hence for "a broad educational alliance, to form mature individuals capable of overcoming division and antagonism, and to restore the fabric of relationships for the sake of a more fraternal humanity" (Pope Francis, 2019).

Introducing fraternity into educational processes... means recognizing it as a basic anthropological datum, from which all the main and positive "grammars" of a relationship can derive: encounter, solidarity, mercy, generosity, but also dialogue, exchange and, more generally, the various forms of reciprocity. ... All humanity, in receiving life, discovers itself joined together in the bond of fraternity, which therefore manifests itself as the principle that expresses the structural reality of the human being (cf. *Laudato Si'*, n. 220). ... The more fraternity is exercised, the more it does not express primarily a moral duty, but rather the objective identity of mankind and the entire creation. (CCE, 2022: 28).

Fraternity is the opposite of

"egotry, a worship of the self, on whose altar everything is sacrificed. ... [and that] generates all those fractures that our educational action is heavily affected by at all levels. We are talking about the rift between generations, between different peoples and cultures, between rich and poor parts of our population ..." (CCE, 2022: 29).

Much work has explored such challenges at the level of university education. Section 2 here looks briefly at such work, including Martha Nussbaum's book *Cultivating Humanity*. However, islands of innovation in higher education usually have limited impact within the seas of mass education systems, and even less impact within societal oceans that are dominated by market power and nationalistic hierarchies. Huge barriers exist to spreading solidaristic fraternal values. We outline some: humanity is an evolutionary product of bitter inter-group struggles and predominant current values worldwide are often unfavourable; and many specific historical, cultural and institutional inheritances in a country like Brazil are especially problematic. Section 3, the main part of the paper, looks then at selected experiments in Brazil in education

for values, not in the easier milieu of universities but in the seas of mass schooling; specifically at an attempt to reach large numbers of children via an online game that raises value questions for discussion, and at a smaller-scale experiment in infusing values awareness into not only specific curricular modules but also overall school operation. Section 4 offers concluding remarks.

2. UNIVERSITY-LEVEL VISIONS; BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR BROAD IMPACT

*Roles of Universities in 'Cultivating Humanity'*ⁱ

Nussbaum's influential *Cultivating Humanity* (1997) looked at various experiments in universities to promote a cosmopolitan humanist perspective. Its title is taken from the first century CE Stoic philosopher Seneca and refers to an education that "makes its pupils free, able to take charge of their own thought and to conduct a critical examination of their society's norms and traditions" (Nussbaum, 1997: 30) and that produces "people who can function with sensitivity and alertness as citizens of the whole world" (p. 8).

Three capacities are required. First: 'the narrative imagination. This means the ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself' (Nussbaum, 1997: 10-11); and, more fully, "a capacity for sympathetic imagination that will enable us to comprehend the motives and choices of people different from ourselves, seeing them not as forbiddingly alien and other, but as sharing many problems and possibilities with us" (ibid., p.85). Second: "the capacity for critical examination of oneself and one's traditions" (p. 9). Third: "an ability to see [ourselves] not simply as citizens of some local region or group, but above all, as human beings bound to all other human beings by ties of recognition and concern" (p. 10). The narrative imagination supports the capacities for solidarity and being self-critical.

Requirements at the level of face-to-face interactions (and interactions with oneself) include cultivation of self-control. This requires support from narratives of well-being that provide alternatives to the narratives of consumerism and indicate alternative channels for improving well-being. Several generations of experiments with alternatives force us, however, to think hard about how and when such shifts are feasible on a large scale, given that we are all social beings who are largely confined and driven within a social system and culture.

Beyond the face-to-face level, other citizenship qualities are required, including deliberative capacities and respect for others. Modalities such as shared postgraduate education for future senior professionals and leaders can, if well designed, make a valuable contribution. Scenarios thinking is one important tool for focusing attention on fundamental issues about sustainable and unsustainable futures, provided that the groups who prepare or consider the scenarios contain sufficient variety of experience. Insight about future possibilities can grow out of, and in turn strengthen, empathy and mutual concern; these qualities are important for making realistic projections as well as for subsequent cooperation. The required types of sustained mutual exposure and serious shared exercises in imagining are feasible within suitably designed postgraduate inter-national education. This can involve substantial mixed groups, each of which lives and works together for a substantial period, and within which junior and mid-career professionals mature who will later assume influential positions within their countries and within international social movements and intergovernmental organizations (George, 1997, 2014).

This type of multi-national postgraduate education can contribute towards two of the value changes required for sustaining humankind: greater global solidarity and a rethinking of quality of life as rooted in richness of relationships more than in volume of possessions. Many of the principles that are embodied in such an educational format can be included also to a worthwhile degree in other, more conventional, formats (see e.g. Walker et al., 2023). For responding sufficiently to the growing worldwide pressures and unfolding crises, however, the world would benefit from creation of more ‘pressure-cookers’ of inter-national higher education, that can contribute to the leadership and energy needed for major processes of intentional social change.

Nevertheless, these islands of global thinking and training cannot suffice, as is suggested too by the history of many global movements (including religious movements). They need to connect effectively to progressive action in the ‘rude’ everyday worlds of schooling, business, feral competitive politics, and daily living. Before discussing some attempts in values education in Brazil, let us consider the scale of the challenges: first, in the light of the evolutionary background of human values and the scope nevertheless for cultural learning; and second, in relation to Brazil’s specific historical trajectory.

Understanding xenophobia and aporophobia and how to counteract them

The Spanish ethicist Adela Cortina (b.1947)’s book *Aporophobia - Why We Reject The Poor Instead Of Helping Them* explores the reality of ‘aporophobia’. She coined the term in 1995, for the rejection of people whom one doesn’t know but whom one fears cannot pay-in sufficiently to a scheme of reciprocal social cooperation. They thus supposedly cannot fit into a social contract. In reality, very many of them could substantially pay-in and hence the problem instead is typically the combination of aporophobia (fear and rejection of the poor) and xenophobia (fear and rejection of the alien, the foreign).

Both phenomena, she argues, are probably in part biologically rooted, as reactions that reflect a past evolutionary stage that continues embedded in our brains. But available to counter this are our proclivities to care for others and, potentially, our narrative imagination. First: “The neuronal mechanisms of cooperative conduct have likely evolved over 350,000,000 years to optimize us for the care for others, for defenseless offspring, and, depending on the empirical conditions, for relatives and friends. The vast majority of neuroethicists believe that these bonds of care extend from relatives to friends to the community, but not to all of humanity.” (Cortina, 2022: 58). Darwin proposed that altruism within groups increased the survival chances of those groups in competition with other groups. “The codes that were incorporated into the brain were fundamentally emotional and were necessary to survive and encourage mutual aid, social cohesion, and suspicion toward strangers” (p. 59).

However, second, we can now modify and extend these codes through reflection, education, and experience. And we vitally must do so. Global environmental change and the conditions of modern economic, technological and military interconnectedness “demand a new morality, a preoccupation with what lies far away, with future generations, with all living beings. And yet our moral motivation continues to be concerned above all with the small group.” (p. 93). Fortunately, our brains are plastic and open to resocialization and new learning. Compassion and recognition of dignity can become embedded in culture even if not present already at birth in our brain structures. So, although moral progress is not heritable, it can be learnt by each new generation and person, including to “cultivate openness to the other, to any and all others, through compassionate recognition.” (p. 144).

To counter aporophobia and xenophobia we need education, supportive institutions, and development of personal “moral conscience, taking the reins of one’s own life and striving toward one’s own goals rather than in thrall to external pressures” (p. 66). Cortina stresses repeatedly the importance of recognition of actual individuals, as opposed to treating people according to a group label. Hate crimes against the poor are typically directed toward them as members of the group of the poor, without recognition of their human specificity as particular persons. Therefore, as advocated by Kant, “shared experiences of suffering and joy, of shared compassion, are the best school of all” (Cortina, 2022: 103); and, in contrast: “When mutual respect flags, democracy is eclipsed by an unrestrained individualist libertarianism” (p. 44).

Challenges from Brazil’s specific historical trajectory

Brazil is a country of deep divides and huge painful transformations. It remains moulded by several historical factors, including these: (i) the many centuries of slavery, which involved habitual violation of principles of respect for human dignity; (ii) the centuries of a strongly oligarchic and patrimonial State; (iii) widespread complacency regarding corruption among rulers and the elite, as well as concerning everyday corrupt actions of citizens;ⁱⁱ (iv) widespread tolerance of violence when it is used exclusively against the poor or socially discriminated; (v) racism and prejudice against people who are considered ‘different’; and (vi) generally low interest in citizen participation. The move over the 200 years of national independence away from the notion that education is not for “the rude people” (Barreto; Chaloba, 2022: 399), to an acceptance that extended education for all is a central right and public commitment, has been very slow. The masses were for generations treated merely as ‘empty vessels’ to be ‘filled’ with a pre-defined set of Christian values.

Only in the Estado Novo period (1937-1945) did public education policy start to become more serious. Even in the post-1889 Republican era, secondary education had remained limited to the elite and within urban areas; by 1954 only 6 percent of the population aged 12 to 18 were enrolled in it. The post-1964 military regime pushed basic education but even by the end of the 20th century only 18% of the population had completed primary school (ibid.).

For a long time in the mid and late 20th century Brazil had a reputation as perhaps the most unequal country in the world, and also as one of the most rapidly urbanizing and rapidly industrializing. The city of São Paulo’s official population grew from 65,000 in 1890 to 8.5 million in 1980. Nowadays, Brazil is known also as one of the most violent countries; the World Population Review for 2023 says that of the fifty most violent cities in the world, seventeen are in Brazil. The family of one of the present authors (Macedo de Jesus) was amongst those moving to São Paulo from the impoverished Northeast in the 1970s. The family was very poor and his primary and secondary education was in one of the worst public schools in the outskirts of São Paulo. Throughout his childhood he saw friends dying, through violence, crime, drugs and alcohol. He saw female friends marrying very young, having babies before the age of 15, in some cases undergoing multiple abortions; and adult men even beating their partners in the streets. He was robbed countless times in public and in the market where his parents worked. But his parents maintained and exemplified good principles at home and Macedo de Jesus managed to enter São Paulo State University. He was the only one out of 60 classmates to make such an exit. Most of his school friends carried on the same

style of their generation, passing forward the same customs and values in the same violent community, and becoming grandparents sometimes even earlier than their parents did.

In 2010 when Macedo de Jesus worked in a team directed by Flavio Comim preparing the Brazil National Human Development Report, he saw his earlier life reflected in that study and decided to investigate values-driven education. In his case his parents had provided an example of mutually respectful human beings; and he had learnt that once one has values internalized then one is more likely to meet anger with sympathy, hatred with compassion, and cruelty with kindness despite a violent environment. He thought about possibilities for a values-guided education for children who do not imbibe good principles at home.

3. VALUES EDUCATION IN BRAZILⁱⁱⁱ

The Brazilian Human Development Report 2009-2010, “Values and Human Development” (UNDP, 2010), included a nationwide consultation to understand what Brazilians considered as crucial towards getting better lives. Called “Brazil Point-by-Point” (UNDP, 2009), this attempted to bring together all segments of society and hear all voices. It had direct participation of more than 500,000 people and involved also 43 institutional partners and representatives of 320 Brazilian cities.

The findings pointed to lack of prioritization of fundamental human values as one of the main reasons for society’s malfunctioning in many areas of life, including what Grille (2013) termed fundamental dysfunctionalities: (i) impairment of interpersonal relations, (ii) casual acceptance of violence, (iii) violation of human rights, and (iv) a lack of quality in education which then drives society away from people-centred development (UNDP 2010). The report argued that good human values are key for a better life, and that promotion of human development requires the reduction of corruption and violence and enhancement of the quality of education through a more holistic approach.

Macedo de Jesus’s doctoral research (2024) investigated how values could be taught and how likely it is that such teaching and learning can alter the prioritization of values among students. Starting from evidence in the 2009-2010 National HDR that the performance of schools and a culture of peace both depend on the presence of foundational social values, his research centred on the processes and impacts of a school-based intervention that the HDR indicated as being amongst possible best practices for making children live values intensively, the so-called ‘Turma de Valor’ (TdV) programme. Macedo de Jesus supplemented his study of TdV by comparisons with two longer-standing programmes: the São Francisco de Assis College (CSFA) in Santo Amaro district of the São Paulo metropolitan area, and the nationwide ViVendo Valores na Educação (VIVE) programme which has been implemented in several locations, including Rio Grande do Norte, São Paulo, Belém, Fortaleza, and Porto Alegre. The three cases were studied during 2015-2017. In this short paper we highlight TdV and CSFA, not VIVE.^{iv}

São Francisco de Assis College (CSFA)

Founded in 1938, this Franciscan institute works for “the comprehensive development of children and adolescents, in an environment focused on living values that prioritize a culture of peace and good” (<https://csfa-com-br>). Father Tony Conry (1938-2023), an Irish priest who lived in Brazil from 1969, helped establish a pre-school in 1980. This grew in scope step-by-step, so that the college came to span from

kindergarten through high school. CSFA does not aim to make a profit. Its fees were roughly 30% of those of a top school in São Paulo, yet it has operated at the same academic level.

The teaching methodology since 1984 has been based on values formation. The college uses “teaching material and a method where other non-Catholic or non-Christian beliefs are also valued and respected, as an area of knowledge to be studied to welcome everyone in their diversity” (CSFA website). After 2000, a more emphatic values formation element was introduced. Teacher Rosana Costa (later the Didactic Coordinator) read “Talking about Education in Human Values” (*Falando sobre Educação em Valores Humanos*; Martinelli, 1999), including on the problems of urban violence faced by their community and school. She then proposed that the school address basic human values in a more structured way. After approval, the whole staff was introduced to the book’s concepts and content. Further, Instituto de Educação em Valores Humanos^v was asked to give a lecture on the Sri Sathya Sai Baba method of education, called Educare. Its content and methodology, for example meditation classes, were formally adopted in 2004. Behavioural change was quickly noticeable among students and teachers; reports of aggression plummeted.

In the Educare approach, human values are not incorporated into the curriculum as an additional subject but are integrated with other subjects and activities, for example in recurrent visits to a hospital, a nursing home and an orphanage. Over the following years CSFA adapted Educare to match its own context and priorities, and gradually replaced its contents by a home-grown design. For example, since 2016 the values to be focused on are no longer taken from an Educare blueprint but are defined by teachers and the pedagogical team for each grade according to its current needs. Corresponding activities and materials are then selected or created by the team to meet the specific needs of different pupil groups.

Like VIVE, which was initiated by Brahma Kumaris, while the CSFA programme has religious roots originally, this basis did not seem to heavily influence the values education content. Indeed, all three of our cases promoted similar sets of values. Already in the CSFA elementary school, the specified objectives include “Development of critical thinking and commitment to social and personal responsibilities. Development of ethics, respect and empathy, autonomy and teamwork skills.” For the final elementary school years these goals are elaborated as: “Autonomy, persuasion and teamwork...skills ...with the exercise of ethics, respect and empathy” and explicit attention to philosophy (<https://csfa.com.br/ensino-fundamental/>). The High School’s objectives include “to become an altruistic individual”.

However, in terms of methods, the CSFA and VIVE programmes held that in values formation a person’s soul has to be touched. Therefore, activities such as meditation became regular practice in both cases, for bringing people together calmly and thoughtfully, to generate a peaceful environment and enhance spiritual understanding. In addition, meditation’s value in increasing memory, concentration, and focus was reported.

The Turma de Valor case

Turma de Valor (‘value class’) represents a more technology-centred approach. It is a digital game-based value-education programme created by a Brazilian consultancy company called Pensare, led by Antonio Celso Rezende Garcia.^{vi} It seeks to economically reach a larger number of children, and without explicit commitment to a particular philosophical or religious perspective. It has been provided free to those interested in implementing it, in the form of software for online or offline learning.

In the game, students are asked to perform actions within stories similar to their normal daily lives. The stories are presented in the form of comic strips, with a mixture of verbal and non-verbal cues. A situation depicting a problem is presented and the student is asked to reflect on it and make their own choices without any direct guidance; they also make an initial choice of which character they will play. Each story contains a series of actions composed for the purpose of instilling one of eight values (honesty, respect, determination, responsibility, friendship, education, organisation, and self-confidence or self-esteem) in children of 9-11 years of age. The age-band was chosen because most Brazilian children remain in school at that age and are by then able to read. The set of values is derived from the ten principles of the UN Global Compact for corporate responsibility and was formulated in response to a felt need to counterbalance the focus in Brazilian education on entrepreneurial and individualistic values. Each value is presented through four different 'problem situations'.

To cover the eight values, participating classes play the game during eight consecutive weeks. During these weeks, Turma de Valor is embedded within the curriculum for that age group. The suggested activity for day 1 is supposed to last 50 minutes. First, students go to the computer room and play the game. Then, back in their classroom, they are meant to talk about the value, guided by a teacher. For day 2, reading activities are suggested. TdV has its own recommended texts, but the teacher can decide what text best reflects that week's value. Students are given time to read the text and comment on their understanding of it. On day 3, a related music activity occurs, and on day 4, a related movie or a small group activity (e.g., writing an essay). On day 5, a large poster is created exhibiting the outputs from the whole week's activities. This routine is repeated for each value, for eight weeks.

Investigation of the Turma de Valor case and of the comparison cases^{vii}

TdV was evaluated through a randomized controlled trial (RCT), implemented for the programme's application in the municipality of Itaperuçu in southern Brazil, one of several locations where TdV has been employed. Macedo de Jesus used an experimental design with random definition of treatment- and control-groups and both pre-treatment and post-treatment measurement, covering eight municipal schools and around 800 students. (See Macedo de Jesus 2024: 153-224 for details.) He used various quantitative and qualitative methods and multiple data sources and approaches to strengthen his analysis of content (input/output) and process.

The main variables studied were the values that children prioritized, before and after their participation in the programme. Information about the socio-economic conditions of households and individual child-level characteristics was collected and used to control for differences in the children's home circumstances and other characteristics. First, socio-economic data was gathered in a household survey to understand the lifestyles of students' families or caregivers. Second, a Basic Values Survey (BVS) was administered, in the form of a validated questionnaire based on Gouveia's (2013) functional theory of human values. The questionnaire was designed to be less abstract and employ more accessible language compared to similar questionnaires, making it suitable for use with people having a low level of education and with school children of around 9 to 11. In addition, the BVS utilizes a modest number of items (18 items on a seven-level Likert scale). It provided consistent measures for six motivational value types.

Qualitative methods were used too, to achieve a more comprehensive assessment. For Turma de Valor, Macedo de Jesus used direct observation, field notes, and in-depth interviews to understand context, situation and processes. Qualitative methods alone were employed to examine the other two cases. The São Francisco de Assis School case study was based on in-depth interviews and active observation. The interviews tried to be close to a normal conversation, while aiming to gain a penetrating view of what happens within these educational organizations.

Main findings

The evaluation of TdV indicated significant engagement of children in the intervention, largely attributed to its digital game-based learning design and supplementary activities. These elements seem to have helped shift students' value orientations somewhat, towards greater social engagement and practical action, while enhancing their interest in their regular studies. A slight but significant improvement in students' empathy and cooperation skills was identified. While the programme's effects on promoting values among participants were positive, they were modest in scale. In addition, the programme encountered several challenges, including unclear objectives, insufficient parental involvement, lack of commitment of municipal managers, and limited resources.

Macedo de Jesus' study concluded that values-driven education can indeed influence value prioritizations, but the impact is heavily contingent on various factors. Key among these are, first, the degree of integration of the values-driven programme into the school's environment and culture, and second, the amount and quality of parental involvement. Regarding the first factor in particular, the study highlighted the necessity of embedding the programmes within a comprehensive and holistic educational framework. Schools need to have a well-developed 'political-pedagogical project' that articulates and reinforces teachers' commitment and provides for their professional development and for overall curriculum development.^{viii} The investigations suggest that a technological package like Turma de Valor can make a useful contribution, if it operates in a context of parental involvement, teacher commitment and such a holistic approach. In isolation it is unlikely to have great impact, especially beyond the short term.

This is consistent with existing literature, which suggests that successful values formation programmes have a clear and consistent design (part of, in Brazil, the school's 'political-pedagogical project') that incorporates human values into a school's mission, objectives and main practices; plus pedagogical practices that foster a student-centred approach, strengthening children's skills to reasoningly value and to act on what they have reason to value (see, e.g., Benninga et al., 2006; Berkowitz 2011). The process needs to be guided by teachers who give students tools for knowledge acquisition rather than just supplying knowledge.

The role of teachers

Flavio Comim notes that for Nussbaum "no curricular formula [and, we can add, no technological package] can substitute the role played by teachers, because their personal attributes (such as being perceptive and provocative) are key for stimulating critical reasoning and for promoting ... unprejudiced and [more] just understanding" (Comim 2014: 140). This matches the assessment in the Vatican Global Compact: "As our schooling experience confirms, a fruitful education does not primarily depend on the preparation of the teacher or the skills of the pupil, but on the quality of the relationship that is established

between them” (CCE 2022: 32), including that the teacher recognizes and respects the insights, energies and enthusiasm of the learner.

Macedo de Jesus’ study underlined the role of teachers and the whole school environment in supporting students’ human values formation and development of internal capabilities; including because when, as in Itaperuçu, many parents are absent on a daily basis because of their work, or absent longer-term, schools play a much greater role in children’s lives. Training programmes should be developed and implemented to prepare teachers to use the requisite programme elements and pedagogical strategies. The Turma de Valor methodology included a 12-hour programme to instruct teachers on game operation and the importance of human values worldwide. Teachers were also introduced to activities for after the game-play experience. VIVE established a more capacious 60-hour training programme; but, reflecting that Brahma Kumaris rely mostly on volunteers, the training was often shortened to 16-20 hours.

Here, CSFA was several steps ahead. It had developed a comprehensive professional development policy which had been successfully incorporated into the school’s ‘political-pedagogical project’ plan. Managers came up with a training programme for new teachers that continued during their first two years, followed by other ongoing education initiatives to keep staff engaged. The average for teachers’ employment at the school has been around fifteen years, indicating the success of the policy. Throughout each school year the directors, coordinators and teachers attend many events for professional development to maintain a high quality of work, maintain focus on the school’s mission, objectives, and values, and strengthen the bond between teachers, students and their families. The school adopted the following three principles for its staff: (i) respect for students’ feelings of belonging somewhere; (ii) demanding from students at school the same respect that they should show to their parents and caregivers at home; and (iii) safeguarding a balance between what one gives and what one receives.^{ix}

The political-pedagogical project of the school

Beyond, and sustaining, the contributions of individual teachers, an effective values-oriented school needs a well-articulated political-pedagogical project (PPP), which articulates its mission and objectives, guides its practices, and provides for consistent purposeful interactions between staff members, parents/caregivers, and pupils. Amongst the three cases examined here, this articulation and consistency was established only by CSFA. Indeed, CSFA appeared to fulfil all the criteria defined by the literature as important for values formation. It should be noted that in contrast to CSFA, both Turma de Valor and VIVE, operating within public sector schools, suffered sometimes from politics-related disruptions which could affect their results.

A well-articulated PPP increases the likelihood of a school being able to counteract constraints, such as lack of commitment by some main actors, sensitivities in the political environment, and a pre-existing teacher-centred educational approach. CSFA developed and initiated a home-grown PPP by involving all staff, as well as students and their caregivers. By the end of the process, the PPP had become a true instrument for articulating and applying the school’s objectives and mission. Parts of the project were the creation of policies for staff development and curriculum development. CSFA’s declared philosophy was incorporated into the curriculum in educational materials designed by the teacher team, led by the didactics coordinator.

Turma de Valor was different, since it focused specifically on the digital game experience, and the training programme was designed to enable teachers and students to play the game. This entailed an important disadvantage compared to the other cases, as teachers had few materials to rely upon. In addition, they were inadequately prepared for dealing with critical incidents; for example, when students had strong emotions in the classroom related to their real-life experiences with the values discussed. Also, greater trained comprehension of ethics would have helped teachers to guide the reflection on such experiences within an ethical framework.

Only the home-grown CSFA programme was able to implement an overall structured plan. It offered a consistent set of activities related to the plan, that supported pupils' exposure to values over many school years. Although VIVE was structured to work within the basic education system, it omitted a focus on strengthening the overall political-pedagogical project. And TdV did not aspire to such a structural project and focused only on a specific child development period, middle childhood.

The crucial role of parenting

The three study cases underline the importance of parenting in children's early socialization. 'Parenting' is understood here as a set of practices beyond only the biological or legal parents' child-rearing activities. In the Turma de Valor case study, for example, parents responsible for their children at home formed less than half of the guardian respondents (44%); very many children were supervised for much of the time by grandparents, co-parents, ex-partners, neighbours, or friends.

The study findings were consistent with the picture that has emerged and been standardized in much international literature regarding positive and negative parenting practices. Parents have been advised to employ supportive and consistent positive practices regarding moral behaviour, monitoring, affective expression, dialogue, involvement, and discipline (OECD, 2012). Such practices can break away from authoritarian parenting styles (UNDP, 2010) and can stimulate children's development of social skills, self-esteem, and self-efficacy (Maccoby; Martin, 1983). Conversely, the effects of negative parenting practices, such as neglect, lax discipline, inconsistent punishment, physical and psychological abuse, stressful monitoring and negative communication, on children who are embedded in a troubled social environment can include depression and stress, aggression and hyperactivity, increased likelihood of drug and alcohol abuse, withdrawal from social life, and poor achievement in all areas (Maccoby; Martin, 1983; UNDP, 2010).

Involvements of (de facto) parents in school activities—for example, volunteering to lead extracurricular activities or occasional arranged visits to the school to better understand their children's school life—can contribute in many ways. Teachers can try to promote positive teacher-parent communication through proactive steps, such as an open-door policy or drop-in periods, providing opportunities for volunteering, and establishment of parent-teacher associations. All were present in CSFA.

Interpretation of the findings

The findings confirmed that human values must be experienced in many ways to become instilled in individuals. Values are not learned through speeches or memorization, they need to be learnt through lived experiences. Cortina stresses that: "Compassion is more than just give-and-take: it is above all the

recognition of another as an equal, connected to us by a tie that antecedes any pact or agreement” (Cortina, 2022: 105); and she cites Emmanuel Levinas: “A person is not an example of a law that must be respected; instead, respect is a response to the other’s face” (Cortina, 2022: 141). It is therefore crucial for schools to develop methodologies that guide children to experience values in a variety of ways. In all three case studies a variety of teaching methods were adopted. The two cases with a religious basis, VIVE and CSFA, took this much further, even offering meditation, quiet reflection time, and silent sitting.

The study suggests that successful values education in Brazil demands a holistic approach, combining technological advances with more traditional, community-oriented strategies. Contrasting with Turma de Valor’s technological approach, both CSFA and VIVE bring a broader strategy, emphasizing the importance of teacher preparation, community engagement, and a curriculum that integrates ethics. Lasting and substantial impact in values education requires elements beyond the digital platform presented by TdV. These include, besides intensive teacher preparation, a strong teacher-student relationship, and an elaborated curriculum that fosters moral and ethical development.

4. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The inspirational philosophy of *Laudato Si’* and the Global Compact more easily finds translation into the worlds of university education, where the Stoic project of ‘cultivating humanity’ faces fewer rough edges than in the worlds of junior schooling. Yet while universities are of fundamental importance (George, 2014, Gasper, 2017), elementary and junior schools are where the vast majority of the global population have some exposure and where their hearts and minds are formed. The scale and complexity of that task increase the attractiveness of technology-based and online methods, but these have limitations and dangers as well as definite strengths. Whereas skills of listening are vitally important (Gasper, 2009), the Global Compact’s Vademecum warns of “growing difficulty in pausing, reflecting, listening to ourselves and to one another” (CCE, 2022, 30) for an Internet-dominated generation.

This paper suggests that it is possible to usefully teach values to elementary and junior schoolchildren; but to do so, a more holistic approach is required than only digital games. Among the three programmes considered in Macedo de Jesus (2024), the CSFA appeared to have the most satisfactory set of elements. This was established through many years of practice and experimentation, that drew on foreign sources but were centred on adaptation to local conditions. The other two programmes seemed to only partially comply with factors identified in the literature for boosting values-education outcomes.

We would like to underline, first, integration of values education into the overall school programme; second, connection with the local society; and third, inspiration, also at junior school level, of the teachers, managers, policymakers and parents who need to be connected to such activities.

First, we recommend systemic integration of values education into the core of the school, as a conscious part of its ‘pedagogical project’, with attention to values being consistently reinforced across many subjects and activities. This embeds values into all the students’ learning experiences. Based on the literature and the cases we have mentioned, one can suggest that a whole-school reform towards values formation has greater potential for positive and long-lasting results compared to a purely classroom-based lesson approach.

To establish such a change in schools' operation and impact, towards introduction of a vibrant atmosphere in which human values are embedded, an intentional political-pedagogical project is required. Serious participation processes can help to define and legitimate a new school trajectory, which will then be reflected in specific objectives and activities, including: a professional staff development policy and movement away from precarious temporary contracts; creation of didactic materials focused on human values formation that are relevant to the local context; actions to get and keep parents involved and to improve teacher-parent relationships; and steps (e.g., interactive teaching and mentoring) to strengthen critical thinking and narrative imagination in the classroom.

Second, linkages of schools' values education with the wider society. Adapting values education programmes to local cultural and social contexts, including to address local challenges and leverage local strengths, promotes relevance and acceptance by the community. Collaborations with non-educational institutions, including community organizations and businesses, can indicate real-world applications and deepen the values education; collaborations with colleges, universities and other research groups can help the programmes to evolve as societal needs and technologies change; and policy advocacy is crucial for securing long-term support to institutionalize values education.

The philosophizing in the texts of the Global Compact on Education and *Laudato Si'* may not connect well to most school classrooms; but it can contribute to strengthening the inspiration and commitment that are needed among teachers, school managers, parents and policymakers. Fortunately, these documents are not addressed only to practicing Catholics and other Christians; even in *Laudato Si'* much is addressed to everyone (see, e.g., Gasper and Rocca 2020 for an overview). Nevertheless, no religion-based discourse will offer a fully consensual basis and secular discourses are required too. Here the United Nations discourses of human rights, human needs, human development and human security (see, e.g., Gasper 2007) make essential contributions, for responding to the global challenges described by *Laudato Si'*; and associated materials for values-education are available.

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RECEBIDO: 02/12/2024
APROVADO: 02/12/2024
PUBLICADO: 07/01/2025

RECEIVED: 12/02/2024
APPROVED: 12/02/2024
PUBLISHED: 01/07/2025

ⁱ Section 2 draws on Gasper (2013, 2017), Gasper and George (2018), George (1997, 2014).

ⁱⁱ For example, bribing a police officer to park in a space reserved for the disabled, when one is not disabled.

ⁱⁱⁱ Section 3 draws extensively on Macedo de Jesus (2024).

^{iv} VIVE was managed by Brahma Kumaris and relied heavily on volunteers. Although no fees were charged for programme implementation, a small cost for the participating schools was involved, to purchase the didactic materials and cater for the training session.

^v *Institute for Education in Human Values*. See <http://www.valoreshumanos.org/index.php>

^{vi} Further information about Pensare: <https://www.webxx.com.br/clientes/pensare2/index.html#enfoque>

^{vii} Macedo de Jesus is indebted to the mayor (2021-2024) of the municipality of Itaperuçu in the state of Paraná, Nenéu Artigas, the former Secretary of Education Geverson Jose Gomes de Castro, their team, and all the schools involved in this study, for permitting and supporting his research. The study was supervised by professors Flavio Comim, Des Gasper, and Natascha Wagner.

^{viii} "The National Education Guidelines and Bases Law (LDB) (1996) determined that Brazilian schools must prepare a document called the Political-Pedagogical Project ... [that] guides the school on administrative and pedagogical issues" (Costa et al. 2021: 2948).

^{ix} CSFA's website presents an ideal for Franciscan educators. They should show competence in their specialist teaching areas and be community-minded and courteous, offering affection, welcome and an encouraging presence; but in addition: provide a human example of idealism and hope, of mercy and vigor, of peace and inner life.