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Ulisses Araújo; Valéria Arantes

University of São Paulo, Brazil

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The Ethics and Citizenship Program: a Brazilian experience in moral education

Ulisses Araújo* and Valéria Arantes

University of São Paulo, Brazil

This article describes the Ethics and Citizenship Program, a moral education project developed by the Brazilian government to promote education in ethics and citizenship in Brazilian fundamental and middle schools through four key themes: ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion. Some findings from a research project that investigated whether such a program did in fact promote the ethical and citizenship awareness of participating students are outlined. As an introduction to the paper’s main concerns, the Brazilian socioeconomic context is characterised, followed by a description of the historical background of moral education in Brazil.

Introduction

Like many nations in the world, especially in Latin America, Brazil faces great challenges in the development of democracy and the construction of a society based on justice and social solidarity, in which people may enjoy better living conditions and quality of life. The historical roots of the country, to be found in the colonisation process led by the imperial powers from the fifteenth to the nineteenth centuries, based on authoritarian government, slavery and the economic exploitation of natural resources to serve the interests of the European colonial metropolises, may be among the reasons for the great inequalities found in Brazilian society nowadays, reflected also in the conditions of violence, corruption and social exclusion in which a large percentage of its inhabitants live (Solow, 1994; Hamilton, 2001).

Facing these current social problems calls for multiple initiatives involving different segments of society and long-term strategies. Education, and specifically moral education, can play a major role in the process of the pursuit of social justice and better living conditions for the population. Changing the mindset of young people towards ethical awareness might help in the accomplishment of these goals.
This article aims to approach these issues in relation to Brazilian society, first describing its socio-economic context as a background to moral education. The Ethics and Citizenship Program (E&C Program), a school-based moral education project developed by the Brazilian government that works through four key themes (ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion), will be described. Some findings will also be presented from a research project that investigated whether such a program did in fact promote the ethical and citizenship awareness of participating students and help to create a moral atmosphere in schools.

The Brazilian context—an overview

Brazil is a republican federation formed of 27 states and 5563 towns and cities. The land area of Brazil extends over 8.5 million square kilometres, occupying just under half (47%) of the area of Latin America. Ranking fifth among the world’s most populated countries, it has approximately 183 million inhabitants, the majority—81%—in urban areas (Brazil. Instituto Brasileiro de Geografia e Estatística (IBGE) [Brazil. Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics] 2007).

Although it has been improving its economic and social indicators (Brazil’s GDP is the tenth in the World Bank ranking), it has high poverty and inequality rates. According to the World Bank, in 2007 the richest 10% of the population accounted for 43.2% of Brazil’s income. According to the United Nations Development Program, the Human Development Index (HDI)\(^1\) for Brazil is 0.807, which gives the country a rank of 70th out of 179 countries, whereas, by contrast, it ranks 10th out of 126 among the most unequal nations, in accordance with the Gini Index, which measures the inequality of the distribution of wealth (UNDP, 2008). For this UN index, the closer to 100 a country is the more unequal it is. Brazil’s index is 57, while Denmark’s is 24, Uganda’s 45, Argentina’s 51 and Uruguay’s 44.

As in many other countries, violence, corruption and social exclusion are major concerns for Brazilian society. A study by the Brazilian Ministry of Justice on violent deaths (homicides, suicides and traffic accidents) found a rate of 49.1 per 100,000 inhabitants, which ranks Brazil as the eighth most violent country in the world. As regards violent deaths among young people (15–24 years old), the country comes fourth, with 79.6 per 100,000 inhabitants (Brazil. Ministério da Justiça [Ministry of Justice], 2008, p. 110), preceded by three other Latin-American countries: El Salvador, Colombia and Venezuela. The Corruption Perception Index (CPI) developed by the organisation Transparency International, ranks Brazil in 72nd place out of 180 countries in its 2007 report (Transparency International, 2008, p. 27). In an atlas of social exclusion, Brazilian economists Pochman and Amorim (2003), using the UN’s HDI and adding data on violence, inequality, youth schooling and employment in Brazil, found that 21% of the Brazilian population live in a situation of social exclusion and only 200 cities have good quality of life.

In terms of education, according to the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Brazil invests approximately 3.8% of its GDP in
education, a lower percentage than that of other Latin American countries such as Mexico and Chile (6.4%) and countries such as Denmark (6.7%), the USA (5.7%) and the UK (5.3%). The school enrolment of the population between 7 and 10 years of age reached 97% in 2005. Although 83% of the population between 15 and 17 years of age is studying, only 33% of them are in their age-related year group, i.e. in middle school. Another aspect of Brazilian reality is that 10% of the country’s population over the age of 15 are illiterate (Brazil. Ministério da Educação [Brazil. Ministry of Education], 2004).

Brazilian cultural diversity has a considerable impact on its educational system. The country’s culture is very rich and complex, with characteristics of miscegenation and diversity, due to being a huge melting pot of races with its roots including native Amerindians, descendants of African slaves and the offspring of European and Asian immigrants. In terms of religion, around 75% of Brazilians declare themselves Roman Catholic and of the remaining 25%, 7% declare they have no religious affiliation and 18% that they are affiliated to Protestant denominations or Afro-Brazilian and Asiatic religions.

All of these socio-economic categories represent real challenges for Brazilian society and have been impelling the government and civil society to establish a socio-political agenda to face them. Themes such as ethics, human rights, social inclusion and peaceful and democratic coexistence, understood as the reverse side of the social problems mentioned, have been placed at the centre of social and educational concerns. In the past decade such themes have become increasingly present in national debates, have been inspiring initiatives of moral education, supported by government policies and implemented in public and private schools, aiming at the construction of a society based on democracy, justice and social solidarity.

The Brazilian educational context and moral education policies

In 1969 the military dictatorship that ruled Brazil from 1964 to 1985 instituted by Law 869 the subject Moral and Citizenship Education as obligatory at all levels of education (Brazil. Senate, 1969). The goals were to inculcate spiritual and nationalist values in society, aiming to develop patriotism and obedience to law. After 1985, with the process of democratisation and a new democratic government ruling Brazil, prejudice against moral education in schools spread throughout the country, because this subject was seen as connected to the dictatorship. The Law was revoked in 1993.

In 1996 the Brazilian democratic Congress approved the Lei de Diretrizes e Bases da Educação [National Education Guidelines and Framework Law] (Brazil. Senate, 1996), which remains in force and stipulates the organisation of the educational system on two levels: basic education and higher education. Basic education is divided into three levels: child education (0–5 years of age); fundamental education (6–14 years of age); and middle education (15–17 years of age). Higher education comprises undergraduate and graduate degrees.
In compliance with this Framework and Guidelines Law, the Ministério da Educação (MEC) [Ministry of Education] organises and finances the federal teaching system, comprising professional training schools, the undergraduate and graduate systems. The states and municipalities provide child, fundamental and middle education and are responsible for their own policies and curricula. The MEC provides technical and financial support at all educational levels, establishes national policies that include the curriculum patterns that should guide the legislation of the individual states and municipalities and, through financial funding policies and the production of pedagogical guidelines, encourages them to adopt its policies.

The legislation in 1996 confirmed that moral education should not be obligatory in the curriculum. But also, in the same year, the Parâmetros Curriculares Nacionais (PCN) [Brazilian Curricular Parameters] (Brazil. Ministério da Educação, 1996a) determined that themes such as ethics, cultural plurality, environment, health and sexual orientation should be introduced as cross-curricular projects and activities in the curriculum for students from 7 to 14 years old. Since then, Brazilian schools have been encouraged to develop moral education activities, though not as specific subjects. Each school is free to decide whether or not to do so.

In line with this policy, aiming to foster moral education through cross-curricular themes in its school systems and justified by the above mentioned socio-economic problems, in 2003 ethics, human rights, democratic coexistence and social inclusion were chosen as core issues by the MEC for the launching of its Ethics and Citizenship Program: Constructing Values in School and Society (Brazil. MEC, 2003).

This program is an initiative of the Brazilian government, which established a partnership involving the MEC, the Secretaria Especial dos Direitos Humanos [Special Secretariat of Human Rights] and the states and municipalities. The program was created when the Partido dos Trabalhadores [Workers’ Party] was elected in Brazil with a program to promote social transformation, strengthen democracy and fight inequality in the country.

According to the MEC (2003), the E&C Program has a commitment to social transformation and assumes that:

> Every child also has the right to learn the meaning of citizenship in its broadest sense. It is, therefore, the duty of schools to teach and act on the basis of the principles of democracy, ethics, social responsibility, collective interest and national identity. (p. 9, our translation)

Thus, although moral education cannot be considered a major educational priority in Brazil nowadays, since it is not mandatory in the school curriculum, the establishment of this program and policies like those mentioned above are steps forward in fostering the development of moral values in schools and in their surrounding communities. They are important tools with which the great inequalities of Brazilian society may be faced, aiming, as they do, at the construction of social justice, democracy and solidarity.
Basic principles of the Ethics and Citizenship Program

The challenge of designing a moral education program in compliance with Brazilian legislation is that it must attend to both general national interests and, at the same time, incorporate diversity and complexity in its design in order to be adaptable to different Brazilian local cultures and to each school’s reality. To achieve this, some principles and objectives have been adopted by the E&C Program:

- In order to establish moral education strategies that consider natural, social and cultural diversity as the ‘normal pattern’ of human life and relationships, and a matrix for moral development, the E&C Program assumed the need to design a complex, multidimensional and multidisciplinary program (Morin, 1987; Schnitman & Schnitman, 2000; Brazil. MEC, 2003; Araújo et al., 2007), which will be explained later in this article.

- It has been assumed that learning about ethics and citizenship requires, among other things, that young people learn to act on a non-violent basis, with respect, solidarity, responsibility and justice. In addition, this presupposes learning how to be involved in interaction and dialogue with peers and adults in diverse settings and to have a commitment to the community’s daily life. To promote this kind of education, students and teachers should assume an active role, whereby they interpret and give meaning to the moral issues present in the school routine and construct their values in relation to their feelings and emotions. The construction of moral values must arise from significant ethical experiences that provide conditions for the students to develop their dialogical ability, an awareness of their and others’ feelings and emotions and their ability to make autonomous decisions in situations of conflict (Cortina, 2000; Schnitman, 2000; Brazil. MEC, 2003; Araújo, 2004; Araújo et al., 2007).

- Recognising that inequality, poverty, violence, corruption and social exclusion are some of the most difficult challenges for the construction of democracy, justice and solidarity in Brazilian society, the MEC through the E&C Program assumed that ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion should be the key themes to be worked on in schools’ daily routine. A moral education program should introduce these issues (and their obverse as counterpoint) into the curriculum of Brazilian schools by means of cross-curricular projects connected with the specific needs and reality of each school’s neighbouring community (Barth, 1990; Stainback & Stainback, 1990; Araújo, 2003; Brazil. MEC, 2003).

These underlying principles were established as the basis for all the E&C Program strategies and the importance of relating them to the school’s neighbourhood through the development of ethics and citizenship forums was stressed. Due to limitations of space, only the main justification adopted by the MEC for each issue and the specific goals established for their development in schools participating in the Program (Brazil. MEC, 2003), will be presented briefly below, followed by examples of their implementation.
Key themes of the Ethics and Citizenship Program

Ethics

The E&C Program took as its starting point that moral education initiatives must have ethical principles at the core of their concerns, working with human diversity and developing initiatives to tackle the exclusion, prejudice and discrimination stemming from different forms of disability and in the face of social, economic, psychological, physical, cultural, religious, racial, ideological and gender differences. To accomplish this the following goals were established for the program: (1) routine reflections about ethics, diversity, moral values and their underlying principles should be brought into the school; (2) discussions about the meaning of ethics and moral values and their importance in the development of human relationships and related behaviour should be stimulated.

Democratic coexistence

The E&C Program assumed that working on conflict resolution is a good way to develop democratic coexistence in daily life. Planning school projects to work on the relationships between adults, adolescents and children, and the conflicts inherent in them, should be the basis for educational strategies that aim at the construction of moral values and democratic coexistence. With this in mind the E&C Program established as one of its general goals: to enable the development of more democratic interpersonal relationships, both in school and in the community, through the implementation of strategies such as school assemblies, conflict resolution and mediation.

Human rights

The study, in every class, of the principles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (United Nations General Assembly, 1948) and other international legislation that followed it, and relating them to real situations observed in the neighbourhood of each school and within society, can be an important tool for a moral education program. Thus the E&C Program adopted the following goal in its strategies: to develop educational projects and experiences focusing on the 30 articles of the UN’s Declaration of Human Rights and the Brazilian Statute for Children and Adolescents (ECA).

Social inclusion

The fostering of the construction of moral values by members of school communities, helping them to face the actual culture of exclusion of modern societies, can result in better living conditions and equal opportunities for everyone. To accomplish this, the following general goals were established by the E&C Program: (1) to develop strategies to help build inclusive schools, open to differences and offering equal
opportunities for everyone; (2) to address exclusion, prejudice and discrimination on the grounds of differences and develop actions to face them.

**Two main approaches of the Ethics and Citizenship Program: community and education**

These four key themes were adopted as the basis for the E&C Program and it was understood that if they reached the communities surrounding the school, the Program would lead to the construction of what may be called ‘moral atmospheres’ in each school and in its neighbourhood, creating more opportunities for, and more deliberate focus on, moral values and community learning (see, e.g., Power & Higgins-D’Alessandro, 2008, p. 231).

**Educating cities**

The approach of the E&C Program was influenced by the International Association of Educating Cities (1990). This is an organisation with more than 100 associated cities throughout the world, including many in Latin America, which hosted its 10th congress in Sao Paulo (Brazil) in 2008 and its 11th congress in Guadalajara (México) in 2009. The Charter of Educating Cities, established during the 1st International Congress of Educating Cities, held in Barcelona (Spain) in 1990, is an important document for the understanding this educational design.

Among the principles that constitute this charter it is stated that through education cities should encourage: (1) freedom and cultural diversity; (2) dialogue between generations and the development of projects oriented towards civic initiatives; (3) quality of life through the creation of a balance with natural surroundings, providing the right to a healthy environment; (4) provision in the cities of spaces, facilities and public services that are suitable for the personal, social, moral and cultural development of all its inhabitants; and (5) awareness of the mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation that affect its inhabitants.

In this way, the E&C Program understands that moral education and a broadened sense of citizenship education should encompass activities in the neighbourhood and be part of the schools’ and communities’ daily routine.

**The School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship**

The E&C Program proposed the implementation in each school of the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship as a way to promote the relationship between school and community. This Forum might involve teachers, students, staff, district school managers, businessmen, families, churches, non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and community members in the organisation and development of activities and projects related to ethics and citizenship themes (such as ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion), integrating the school and the nearby community in an atmosphere of moral education. This is the main strategy of the Program.
There is no single format for the development of the forums, since the E&C Program requires that each school adapt the guidelines to its own reality and thematic interests. Usually, supported by the school’s principal, a group of teachers and students take the responsibility of leading the process and involving other members. As the program is not obligatory, there is no external control over how it should be implemented locally, this being left to each community.

It is suggested that meetings of the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship should take place at least once a semester, promoting: interaction among experts, school staff and community members; and the articulation of partnerships between the school and other social institutions and government and NGOs in a position to give support to the projects. Through objective and planned activities the Forum’s main goal is to define the ethical cross-curricular themes that will be developed in the classrooms and that will also link the school curriculum to topics relevant to the nearby community. So, a specific school community can decide to work on the key theme of democratic coexistence because it is facing problems with gender violence; another school might focus on the key theme of social inclusion because there is a high rate of student drop-out; or a school might decide to work for an environmental cause since is situated in an area subject to flooding and this affects some basic rights of the population.

The leaders of the process initially set up roundtables or invite someone to speak on general moral issues, followed by debates that try to narrow down the chosen theme and link it to the school’s and the community’s needs. Alternatively, the forum can start with a report about initial studies on the theme. Usually this opening session is followed by discussions in small groups, involving staff, students and community members, trying to mobilise people with regard to specific projects to be developed at the school and in the neighbourhood. These projects must be developed in the classroom during the next term and involve extra-mural activities in the community in the attempt to relate the community’s real-life situation to the curriculum.

The forum meeting, lasting two to three hours, ends with a social get-together including refreshments, cultural exhibitions and performances presented by students and people specially invited from the nearby community.

Program implementation

In accordance with Brazilian legislation, the E&C Program was designed as optional and some strategies have been developed to enable schools and educational systems nationwide to get to know it and decide whether or not to join in. Five of the strategies adopted are outlined below.

Internet site

Thinking in terms of a country of continental dimensions like Brazil, the use of virtual tools, such as the Internet, is important to reach distant and even isolated communities. Further, it helps to democratis access to up-to-date information and
promote peer interaction. In an attempt to promote an exchange of experiences among teachers involved in the Program’s implementation throughout the country, a specific webpage of the E&C Program was created on the MEC’s website giving information and principles behind the Project and offering the possibility of downloading textbooks and tools for peer interaction (http://mecsrv04.mec.gov.br/seif/eticaecidadania/index.html).

Development of textbooks and guidelines for school and community orientation

Although there are no official textbooks in Brazil, the MEC usually produces some resource materials to be used for reference by the schools. So the first activity of the E&C Program, in 2003, was the elaboration of a ‘resource pack’ containing the guidelines of the Program and four textbooks to help in the implementation of the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship and cross-curricular projects. Each textbook was dedicated to one of the Program’s key themes (ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights or social inclusion), with the objective of fostering it in the school routine. These resource packs have been distributed to all Brazilian public Middle Education schools (students aged 15–17) and to all the Fundamental Education schools (students aged 6–14) in cities with more than 100,000 inhabitants (a total of 26,000 schools, approximately 13% of Brazilian schools).

These didactic materials were based on constructivist perspectives (Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky), critical pedagogy (Paulo Freire), project-based pedagogy (John Dewey) and service-learning (Andrew Furco, 1994, 2002). In terms of moral education, the main influences were Jean Piaget, Lawrence Kohlberg and the Spanish authors Josep Puig (1995, 1996) and Genoveva Sastre and Montserrat Moreno (2002; Moreno, 1993).

The resource packs were designed on the basis of a general theme that serves as the guideline for the production of the textbooks. The first resource pack had Ethics and Citizenship as its general theme. Subsequently, through its website the MEC carried out a national survey of schools to guide the production of the next three packs. More than 1000 schools replied suggesting themes with which they would like to work. The three general themes chosen as guidelines for the new resource packs were: (1) social inclusion and exclusion; (2) development of youth’s leading role; and (3) ethnic-racial and gender differences (Brazil. MEC, 2007).

To exemplify, four textbooks composed the Ethnic-racial and gender differences pack, each one focusing on one of the program’s key themes: ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion. Each textbook is divided into three different chapters.

- The first chapter presents theoretical texts, from significant Brazilian and foreign authors, for the purpose of giving the teachers some knowledge and theoretical support. For example, in the human rights textbook of this pack there is a text from Flavia Piovesan, a Brazilian sociologist, about affirmative actions from the perspective of human rights (Piovesan, 2005).
The second chapter presents new media perspectives for moral education, such as videos, websites, music, short-feature movies etc. For example, in the ethics textbook of this pack the short-feature movie *O xadrez das cores* [The chess of colours], directed by Marco Schiavon (2004), shows how, through a chess game, a 40-year-old black woman succeeds in changing a relationship of strong racial prejudice with her 80-year-old Caucasian mistress.

The third chapter of all the textbooks adduces reports of experiments undertaken throughout the country, showing how some schools have been facing problems related to the theme under discussion. For example, in the democratic coexistence textbook the five school reports that won the national Constructing Gender Equality award are presented.

As the main goal of the resource packs is training teachers to implement the Program, after each of the chapters there are suggestions for activities and cross-curricular projects that could be undertaken by the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship and/or inside each classroom.

Finally, the textbooks were designed with two structural characteristics—decentralisation and non-linearity—thought to permit flexibility so that each school might develop its own Ethics and Citizenship Program locally. This means that the schools are not obliged to follow the E&C Program suggestions, which are to be regarded as reference points, and that the educational materials were conceived independently in such a way that there is no linearity or specific order for their development. For example: in order to foster democratic conflict resolution in its routine a middle school in São Paulo, implemented classroom assemblies during the first semester, in accordance with the suggestion of the democratic coexistence textbook of the *Development of youth’s leading role pack*. The next semester, the same school undertook a curricular project that led students to study the 30 articles of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and evaluated the extent of respect for them in the nearby community. This project was partly based on a suggestion in the human rights textbook in the *Social inclusion and exclusion pack*.

Use of the resource packs could be a collective decision, taken by the school board and recommended to all the teachers or could be a suggestion from the group responsible for operating the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship. But if a school is not keen on developing the E&C Program, as has often happened, a teacher may use the materials to develop the projects with his students on his own initiative.

**Teacher training seminars**

A key strategy used to implement the program has been the nationwide training of teachers. Since 2003 more than 30 seminars have been held locally in 20 states in partnership with states and municipalities. More than 4000 teachers have participated in these meetings, usually for 16 hours spread over two consecutive days, at which they have been able to get to know the E&C Program, learn how to implement it in their schools and communities and how to use the resource packs.
Under the guidance of MEC’s consultants, the seminars have typically been divided into four periods of four hours each: (1) a lecture on ethics and citizenship; (2) a presentation of the Program’s principles, the resource packs and different ways to implement them in diverse school settings; (3) group-work in which teachers had to collectively elaborate a project for the Program; and (4) an exchange of views in which each group had to present and discuss with others the ethical themes they would like to work on and how they would implement the Program in their school communities.

To evaluate the usefulness of the training for the implementation of the Program in the teachers’ respective school communities, at the end of the 10 seminars carried out in 2007, the 1046 participants in that year responded to a questionnaire. The last question asked for an overall evaluation: 46% of the teachers graded the seminars as excellent, 52% as good, 2% as regular and none as poor. These responses suggest that after the seminars teachers went back to their schools with rich and diverse ideas as to how to create a forum and how to develop interdisciplinary and cross-curricular projects adapted to their local situations.

TV programs

The MEC has an educational TV network (named School TV) that reaches all schools in the country through dish antenna and the government has a public educational TV broadcast that has an open signal to most homes in the country. These two public TV networks produce, in partnership, a series called Jump into the Future. In 2007 five programs in this series based on the E&C Program were produced. These programs are periodically repeated, thus contributing to the enlightenment of the population in general on themes of ethics and citizenship and helping to disseminate the E&C throughout the country.

National Ethics and Citizenship Program Award

To foster the program nationwide, in 2006 the MEC launched an award to provide financial support to fundamental (6–14-year-olds) and middle schools (15–17-year-olds) for the development of their ethics and citizenship projects for one year.

Around 450 schools submitted proposals and 170 schools, from small towns deep in the interior of the Amazon region to big cities in the rich southern part of Brazil, were selected to receive the award. Although completely diverse in their choice of themes and methods of implementation—according to the Program’s conception and rubric—the schools chosen had in common a willingness to involve students, staff and communities in projects on ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion. Moreover, their projects were concerned with service learning, with most schools trying to involve students in social projects, such as the inclusion of the elderly in digital learning, teaching illiterate neighbours to read and write, organising fundraising campaigns to help people from flooded areas and helping at blood clinics and orphanages.
After one year each of the 170 schools receiving the award were obliged to send the MEC a report on how they had developed the Program in their school and community and how they had used the grant. To evaluate the efficacy of the implementation of the Program in those schools, the MEC decided to analyse the first 80 of the reports that they received.

Ten of these reports were not approved because they had not achieved the goals they had proposed, but 15 were considered exemplary for the Program. These schools showed great commitment to the principles of the E&C Program, presenting in their report how they had introduced the forum and involved students, teachers and community members in cross-curricular projects, applying at least one of the Program’s key themes. This is the only evaluation of the Program that has been made by the MEC so far.

Table 1 summarises four of the exemplary projects from different regions in Brazil showing how different school communities understood and implemented the E&C Program.

Research based on the Ethics and Citizenship Program on school moral atmosphere and students’ ethical awareness

The MEC did not make any formal overall evaluation of the E&C Program to assess whether its implementation actually fostered the creation of a moral atmosphere in the schools and influenced students’ awareness of ethical issues. However, the authors of this article, special consultants of the MEC for the E&C Program,6 carried out a small independent research project in two public schools in the city of São Paulo (where approximately 130 schools were involved in the E&C Program) with a view to making some evaluation of both these goals. The role of the researchers was to train the schools’ teachers, supervise the development of the research project through weekly meetings and, together with five graduate students7 and 10 of the schools’ teachers, undertake the data collection. Although our role as project consultants implementing the Program in the country and as independent researchers evaluating it may not be easily separated and the research was only conducted in only two of the many schools which have adopted the Program in some form across Brazil (1200 schools are registered on the MEC website), we believe that, whilst they are not generalisable to the Program as a whole, these findings are indicative of the work of schools that have worked with the Program and of its influence on the ethical awareness of their students.

During a teacher training seminar for the E&C Program held in the northern area of the city of São Paulo, all the teachers present were invited to join in a research project. Initially, 15 schools offered to participate. Two schools were selected to participate through a process that lasted two months, because of the strong commitment to the project showed by the schools’ leadership and their geographical proximity to each other and the researchers’ location, thus facilitating in-depth research over two years. The schools were both situated in the same poor neighbourhood and were attended by 1500 students (School A 900 students School B 600 students) from 1st to 9th grades (6–14-year-olds).
A naturalistic approach was adopted in this research, trying to capture and understand the multiple variables in the focus on both the development of a moral atmosphere in the schools and students’ awareness of ethical issues in the natural and complex school and community settings. This kind of approach helps to elicit and share human constructions of reality in social contexts. According to Erlandson et al. (1993, p. 66), ‘The design of a naturalistic study is not fully established before the study begins but emerges as data are collected, preliminary analysis is conducted, and

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key themes</th>
<th>School projects</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Democratic coexistence</td>
<td>Project title: Students’ role in daily citizenship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City/State/Region: Extrema/Rondonia/North (Amazon)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age: 15–17 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development summary: through various activities, such as E&amp;C forums, seminars,</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>drama plays and curricular projects, students developed classroom activities</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>related to the following themes: prejudice against regional ethnic minorities;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>modern society’s values; the family; ethics in politics; human rights; the</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Amazon forest and sustainability.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ethics</td>
<td>Project title: Ethical values in school and community</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City/State/Region: Itumbiara/Goiás/Central-West</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Age: 15–17 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development summary: supported by the E&amp;C forum, staff and students developed</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a series of projects: blood collection for the city blood clinic; in partnership</td>
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<td>with the city environment secretariat, students collected seeds and planted</td>
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<td></td>
<td>them in devastated areas; in partnership with a local community college,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>students developed a project about recycling and environmental consciousness;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>a community campaign to collect toys and clothes for an orphanage; before city</td>
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<td></td>
<td>elections, students carried out a survey in the community about citizens’</td>
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<td></td>
<td>expectations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Human rights</td>
<td>Project title: Children and adolescents: the quest for citizenship</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City/State/Region: Bodó/Rio Grande do Norte/Northeast</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Age: 10–14 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development summary: drama plays focusing on children’s and adolescents’</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>rights; bimonthly ethics and citizenship forums; classroom group studies about</td>
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<td>children’s rights; visits to urban and non-urban areas of the town to work</td>
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<td>with the socially excluded population on their rights.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Social inclusion</td>
<td>Project title: Literacy and social inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>City/State/Region: Palmas/Tocantins/Central-West</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Age: 6–17 years</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Development summary: the school developed a series of projects and programs to</td>
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<td>foster social inclusion, such as: a program to teach illiterate workers to</td>
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<td>read and write; a program to promote digital inclusion; and projects on African</td>
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<tr>
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<td>culture and the schooling of children with Down’s Syndrome.</td>
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the context becomes more fully described.’ Another characteristic of this approach is not to polarise the use of qualitative and quantitative instruments, understanding that there is a continuum between both types of instruments and that their complementarity brings greater richness to the research and data analysis.

Methods

Intervention in the school community

There were three main intervention procedures, aiming to promote the creation of a moral atmosphere and the construction of democratic values and the strengthening of citizenship in the schools’ daily activities:

- **Teacher training**, which included a 30-hour course given to all the school staff and a 120-hour course for the 10 teachers directly involved in the development of the research project (five from each school). The training, based on the E&C Program, focused on how to insert ethical and human rights topics across the curriculum, relating the schools’ regular subjects to the themes defined by the School Forum of Ethics and Citizenship.

- **Introducing regular forums of ethics and citizenship** so that during the two years of research, each school held four forum meetings.

- **Fostering students’ leading-role in the school and in the community** through the participation in ethical cross-cultural projects proposed by the teachers, such as: a community radio station, a school newspaper, a dancing group, a drama club, the solidarity students’ group and a percussion band. All the activities were undertaken by the students under a teacher’s supervision and had an underlying ethical theme, defined by the Forum of Ethics and Citizenship. Some of the projects were: Our school and the surrounding environment, Songs and orality in the Afro-Brazilian culture, Differences and diversity at school and in the neighbourhood and Radio communication and democracy.

Data collection

A multi-methodology approach was adopted, in the belief that qualitative and quantitative methods would add reliability, breadth and depth to the investigation (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Valles, 1999). Three instruments, allowing qualitative and quantitative analysis, were used in the research on the schools’ processes of introducing ethics and citizenship concerns into their daily routine and also to gauge the influence of the intervention undertaken over two years on students’ ethical awareness:

- **Semi-structured interviews** each lasting half an hour, involved eight teachers, four pupils, four parents and four school employees in each school. The interviews were conducted at the end of the first year of the research project and the questions focused on perceptions of the development of the project and relationships between the school and the community.
• *Written reports* prepared monthly by the 10 teachers directly involved in the project and weekly by the researchers and graduate students, recorded direct observations, informal conversations and the pacing of the actions implemented.

• *Written questionnaires* to evaluate students’ ethical awareness of social, citizenship and democratic issues and to see how they would face conflicting situations. Students were asked to respond to seven open-ended questions, with the following research goals:

Q1. It is your turn to decide on the theme of the next issue of the school newspaper. Which theme would you choose and why? (Goal: to discover a student’s personal and social interests).

Q2. What is ethics? And how should ethics be implemented in classes at school? (Goal: to discover if a student has a notion of ethics).

Q3. Describe a situation in which your rights were not respected and explain why. (Goal: to evaluate a student’s awareness of individual rights).

Q4. Describe a situation of prejudice and discrimination that you saw at your school. Describe why it happened and what should be done. (Goal: to evaluate a student’s awareness of prejudice and discrimination).

Q5. In your school there is a homosexual student and people don’t like to talk to him. Why does this happen? And what should be done about it? (Goal: to evaluate a student’s awareness of how to face conflicts regarding different perspectives on prejudice and discrimination).

Q6. In your school there is a student who suffers from epilepsy and people don’t like to talk to him. Why does this happen? And what should be done about it? (Goal: to evaluate a student’s awareness of how to face conflicts regarding different perspectives on prejudice and discrimination).

Q7. Describe places and actions that strengthen or violate ethics and diversity principles in your neighbourhood (Goal: to discover whether students are able to identify ethics and diversity violation in the community).

Although these specific topics were not necessarily directly related to specific the cross-curricular projects developed in the schools, they were broadly connected with the E&C principles: ethics, human rights, social inclusion and democratic coexistence. The questionnaires was administered at the end of the second year of the project under the supervision of one of the 10 participating teachers and a graduate student and were answered voluntarily (by over 90% of the students in each classroom) and anonymously during class time by a sample totalling 289 Grade 6–9 students (10–14-year-olds). The students were from three schools situated in the same neighbourhood:

• Group 1. *Leading-role students in Schools A & B*: 56 students (Grade 6–9) who were deeply involved and active in the 10 teachers’ ethics and citizenship projects and forums in School A and B where the E&C Program took place over two years.

• Group 2. *Students in Schools A & B*: 142 regular students from the two schools where the E&C Program took place over two years. These students belonged to one randomly selected class of each grade (6–9), from each school.

• Group 3. *Students in School X*: 91 students from a nearby school that did not take part in the E&C Program and had no planned moral education program. This
school was used as a control group and the students belonged to one randomly selected class of each grade (6–9).

Questionnaire analysis

Qualitative analysis was undertaken by the main researchers, according to the meaning found in the students’ questionnaire responses (Patton, 1990). The answers to each question were analysed by the corresponding author according to the goals indicated. In order to present an overall summary of students’ ethical awareness in this article, the separate categories of analysis used within each of the seven questions were aggregated to create three general categories: ethical awareness, other answers and non-responses.

Ethical awareness. This was defined as responses that represent ethical and citizenship concerns. In this general category, a student might show consciousness in terms of values and virtues relating, on the one hand, to justice, solidarity, citizenship and the pursuit of personal and collective happiness and, on the other hand, s/he might show an awareness of violence, social exclusion, inequality, discrimination and prejudice (Aráujo et al., 2007). In relation to each of the seven questions of the questionnaire a student’s written answers demonstrating the capacities set out in Table 2 were considered to indicate ethical awareness.

Other answers. All answers that could not be classified as instances of ethical awareness were included in this category. They included responses not related to an ethical concern, strictly personal concerns, nonsense, even examples of prejudice and discrimination: e.g. on (Q1) choosing issues for the school newspaper one student answered, ‘sports, because I like sports’; on (Q5) a situation involving homosexuality at school, a girl answered ‘I would beat him, because a man must be a man’; on (Q7) places and actions that strengthen or violate ethics and diversity principles in your neighbourhood, a student answered ‘when you have something in your hands and another person wants it’.

Non-responses. Many students did not answer all of the questions, leaving some answers blank. We attribute this to the complexity of some of the open-ended questions and the students’ age.

After the qualitative analysis, the data for each question were transformed into tables and figures.8

Some findings

This section illustrates the influence of the E&C Program in fostering a moral atmosphere in the two participating schools and indicates some students’ awareness of ethical issues. These findings are part of a larger quantitative and qualitative data set,
Changing the school’s moral atmosphere

Three excerpts from the qualitative data taken from the written reports exemplify the process by which the forum was being implemented, how teachers were moving...
forward in the development of cross-curricular projects and how the students were
developing critical and ethical consciousness.

An excerpt from the minutes of the third Forum of Ethics and Citizenship held in
School A demonstrates how these meetings were conducted and how staff, students
and community members were involved in improving the local environment. The
theme was ‘Our school and the surrounding environment’:

The forum meeting opened with a report conducted by Professor Marianne. She talked
to the audience about the school district, its geographical location and size, the number
of school units, public equipment, bodies representative of the community and nearby
hospitals and she also presented some socioeconomic data about the region. Then she
was supported by a group of students who presented the data of a research project
conducted by teachers and students showing, with photos, how the community and the
local government authorities were neglecting the maintenance and cleaning of the parks,
streams and vacant lots around the school. …After some debate, the group was subdi-
vided and some questions were proposed to guide the discussion for one hour. The first
group discussed the question ‘How can we improve our local environment?’ They
stressed the need to act and put into practice some awareness campaigns through schools,
health centres, local authorities and NGOs, in order to promote the awareness of families
that they needed to separate organic and non-organic waste and examine and modify their
habits before criticising others and blame the government as solely responsible for the
environmental situation…

Another excerpt comes from a reflection by a teacher in School B who worked on an
environmental issue with her sixth-grade students, showing how the staff were
making an effort to develop cross-curricular projects:

There was great difficulty at the beginning in developing an interdisciplinary project,
because it was difficult to talk with teachers collectively. …But following the environmen-
tal theme we decided in the forum, I spoke with the science teacher who began to work
on a herbarium, together with the students. With the environment in mind the art teacher
and students constructed a ‘tree of happiness’, on which the pupils expressed their feel-
ings. In computer classes they worked on the issue of global warming, searching for
images on the Internet and then constructing sentences. So, although we did not involve
all the teachers, we did what was possible.

Finally, a passage is presented from a students’ group report in School B after studying
the conditions of the school environment:

We took pictures of dirty and clean places inside the school. We did that because we
wanted to show the school what our environment was like. We know that we must
preserve Nature and the environment and we can’t pollute and destroy the world, but we
need to start with the places where we live. …We found the water fountain dirty and this
is a lack of hygiene. How are we going to drink water? …We suggest that people take care
of the playground, the yard, the classrooms and the water fountains…

These passages show the collective involvement of the school community in an
ethical theme, important to their daily life, and give an idea of how the E&C
Program strategies were helping them in the development of a moral school atmo-
sphere where people are concerned about problems that go beyond their individual
interests.
Students’ awareness of ethical issues

Table 3 shows the number of written answers to seven open-ended questions given by the three groups of students, which were considered to demonstrate ethical awareness, as indicated in Table 2, other answers and non-responses.

Importantly these findings indicate that the students from Schools A and B combined, where the E&C Program was implemented, gave a greater percentage of answers that were classified as showing ethical awareness than the students from School X that did not have any formal moral education program. Whereas 46% of the answers given by the students of Schools A and B to the seven questions were considered to demonstrate ethical awareness, only 27% of the answers from the students of School X were so rated. Moreover, leading-role students of Schools A and B who became deeply involved and active in the ethics and community projects gave an even greater percentage of answers—63%—that were considered ethically aware. The results did not vary across the seven questions and in each of them the group of leading-role students gave a higher percentage of answers categorised as showing ethical awareness compared to the responses of the other students from Schools A and B, who also had a higher percentage of answers compared to the students from School X.

Critique and conclusion

This article had two main aims: to present the basis and principles of the Ethics and Citizenship Program, a Brazilian project to foster moral education in schools; and to outline some research data indicating the Program’s influence on the moral atmosphere of two participating schools and to show the ethical awareness of some student participants. Based on the experience described, as moral education researchers and as consultants of the MEC for the Program, we offer a brief critical overview of the Project’s implementation throughout Brazil.

The Program needs to be seen within the long-term concern to develop strategies to help Brazilian society to face its major socioeconomic challenges of inequality, violence, corruption and social exclusion, through the moral development of its youth. Although well conceived and planned, the implementation of the Program has, however, been too dependent on the personal beliefs of those occupying positions of authority on the government and state boards of education. Thus the
Program has often faced the problem of the discontinuity in implementation due to personnel changes. For example, between 2003 and 2008 Brazil had three different Ministers of Education and, with each ministerial change, the Program had to be explained and then restarted. As a result many of its strategies, such as TV programs and further resource packs, videos supporting teacher training and the Internet platform to promote peer-to-peer interaction suffered discontinuity in development. Schools, states and municipalities interested in the Program’s development suffered from a lack of strong support in their daily activities and many teachers eager to develop the Program in their communities felt abandoned.

Although the MEC holds the position that it is the duty of schools to teach and act on the basis of principles of ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion until this becomes government policy, introduced formally into the school curriculum, the moral education of Brazilian youth will continue to be relegated to second place in society and dependent on the personal decision of each individual teacher. This situation with respect to Brazilian educational policy may be seen as a weakness in the attempt to promote the development of moral values in Brazilian youth.

Further, as moral education is not a priority either for many Brazilian schools or for many teachers, in the majority of cases the ‘resource packs’ sent to all schools were simply ignored. This is a waste of public finances and this strategy of blanket dissemination of resources should be revised and a more efficient way to involve schools in the Program should be devised.

Related to this, as part of the Program a more systematic evaluation of its strategies and of how the program reaches school communities should be made and closer follow-up and support should be provided for the schools seriously involved in its implementation. Only the 170 schools that received an award were assessed and had some kind of direct support for one year. This is too little for a program of such dimensions and jeopardises its goals.

Secondly, in terms of the limited research and evaluation that has been carried out, whilst the findings that have been briefly reported here can only be indicative and not generalisable to the Program as a whole, they suggest that setting up programs like the Ethics and Citizenship Program which focuses on planned and systematic work on the themes of ethics, democratic coexistence, human rights and social inclusion in schools’ daily activities, related to the actual moral problems of each school’s surrounding community, can be a powerful way to foster democratic and moral education. It can help the school community, teachers and students to develop a process that may lead to an improved moral atmosphere promoting ethical and citizenship concerns in accordance with their local situation and needs. The finding that the leading-role students with an active and committed role in the Program development in two schools were more likely to show ethical awareness reinforces the idea that the Ethics and Citizenship Program offers a promising path.

We hope to have highlighted in this article the efforts of Brazilian society to find ways to pursue social justice, democracy and better living conditions for the population through a moral education program. With further improvements the Ethics and
Citizenship Program may be seen as an efficient tool to change the mindset of young people toward the development of ethical awareness, understanding and reasoning in schools and communities. The accomplishment of these goals would help Brazil to successfully face the socio-economic challenges of inequality, violence, corruption and social exclusion that have historically undermined its culture and society.

Notes on authors

Ulisses Araújo is Associate Professor, University of São Paulo, Brazil, and President of the Research and Graduate Studies Committee. He received a PhD in Developmental Psychology from the University of São Paulo. Since 2003 he has been a special consultant for the Brazilian Ministry of Education, in the Ethics and Citizenship Program. His publications include: *A construção de escolas democráticas* [The construction of democratic schools] (São Paulo, Moderna), 2002; and Pedagogia de projetos e direitos humanos: caminhos para uma educação em valores [Human rights and project pedagogy: tracks for moral values education], *Pro-Posições*, 19(1), 193–204, (2008).

Valéria Arantes is Assistant Professor, School of Education, University of São Paulo, Brazil. She received a PhD in Psychology from the University of Barcelona, Spain. She is a special consultant for the Brazilian Ministry of Education, in the Ethics and Citizenship Program. Her publications include: *Afetividade na escola: alternativas teóricas e práticas* [Affectivity in education: theoretical and practical alternatives] (São Paulo, Summus), 2003; and Sastre, G. V., Arantes, V. and González, A. (2007) Violencia contra las mujeres: significados cognitivos y afectivos en las representaciones mentales de adolescentes [Gender violence: cognitive and affective meanings in adolescents’ mental representations], *Infancia y Aprendizaje*, 30(2), 197–214.

Notes

1. The HDI is an index used to rank countries by level of ‘human development’, considering life expectancy, literacy, educational attainment and GDP per capita.
2. Although the terms ‘ethics’ and ‘moral’ are used interchangeably by many authors, due to the Greek and Latin roots of the words, in the E&C Program they are differentiated: ethics refers to the ideas and principles that underwrite the moral life; and moral refers to the norms, rules and laws that regulate human social behaviour; both aiming at individual and collective well-being.
3. A law approved in 1990 by the Brazilian Senate, which considered children and adolescents as citizens and gave adults the obligation to guarantee and promote their full protection.
4. An award organised by three Brazilian Ministries and two civil society organisations.
5. This research project was funded by Fundação de Amparo a Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP).
6. As university professors, the authors were invited to work as special consultants of the Ministry of Education for the Ethics and Citizenship Program and assumed responsibility for writing the resource packs and the teacher training throughout the country.
7. We should like to acknowledge the help of Kenya Gonsalves, Ana Maria Klein, Moyses Baptista, Brigitte Haertel and Lucivane Garrido.

8. Further data are available from the authors.

References


