VALUES EDUCATION AT UNIVERSITY: NECESSARY OR NOT?

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Abstract

This paper describes a project that addresses the latter approach at the City University of Hong Kong. The aim of the project is to develop a web-based professional development programme for academic staff, that will firstly encourage them to reflect on ways in which they can promote character development in their students through examining their own behaviours and interactions with their students, and secondly to share examples of good practice. As well as addressing the prevention of negative student behaviours in relation to common problems like plagiarism and unfair evaluation feedback, the project will also examine ways in which academic staff can be more pro-active in enhancing students' self-esteem and helping them to develop qualities like perseverance, problem-solving skills, and the ability to work effectively in teams and resolve conflict constructively.

In the first phase of the project, questionnaire data have been collected from academic staff and students to assess, from the perspective of both groups, the relevance and importance of values education at the university level, and the most serious values-related problems that occur in student-staff interactions. Our survey results indicate that both teachers and students consider values education to be important at the university level. The evidence also suggests that values education ought be implemented indirectly via appropriate role modelling by the teachers, rather than through a specific course.

In the next phase, staff-student focus groups will be formed to discuss examples of strategies that can contribute positive solutions to these problems. This paper focuses on the questionnaire outcomes and outlines the framework for the professional development programme.

Key words: Values education, character development, professional development
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Introduction

The basic aim of values education is the development of character through all the five layers of the human personality: intellectual, physical, emotional, psyche and spiritual. It is concerned with 'reducing violence, respecting honest work of every kind, rewarding excellence at every level and producing people who can care competently for their own families and contribute effectively to their communities' (Noddings 1995: 76).

Some of the human values that have been regarded as the basis of civilised society throughout history and throughout the world, regardless of religious or cultural beliefs, include:
- the development of general knowledge, common sense and problem-solving skills;
- perseverance in the face of difficulties;
- unity, co-operation and team-work to achieve common goals;
- tolerance, understanding and accepting differences between individuals;
- honesty and truthfulness;
- inner harmony and outer peace as fundamental ways of getting to create peace on a wider scale - between family members and friends, between neighbours, regions and countries;
- giving time and effort to others willingly and without any expectation of physical or emotional reward.

In recent times there appears to have been a swing away from these values as people have become more concerned with materialism and power. This has led to the generation of an increasing body of literature challenging teachers at universities or other higher education institutions to incorporate values education, either directly or indirectly, into the learning environments they create (Serow and Dreyden 1990, Jennings and Nelson 1996). One of the major rationales for this is that we are becoming increasingly concerned about providing life-long learning and preparing students for possibly several career and lifestyle changes that include, for many, coping with unemployment. Therefore, it is becoming more and more important that we are not concerned just with teaching knowledge, skills or specific vocational training, but also strategies for problem solving and coping with change. In other words, education is becoming more concerned with developing the whole person. With broadening concepts of education and development we have a growing awareness that all of life is formative in shaping one's moral dispositions. Values education, therefore, is not just for children and should not end when they finish their formal schooling, but rather be consciously and deliberately included in education throughout adulthood (Craig 1991). By helping enhance the implementation of values education in the City University of Hong Kong (CityU), this project will directly contribute to the goals of promoting *life-long learning* and *whole person development* described in the University's Strategic Plan 1997-2002.

Current practice of values education in CityU

There are two ways in which values education can be addressed. One is through formal teaching about the 'mechanics' of values - that is to equip students with the knowledge about and tools and strategies required to incorporate various values into their vocational practices. At CityU, this kind of formal training is provided via courses such as 'Business Ethics' (MGT 2210) offered by the Department of Management. While this kind of formal teaching has an important place in vocationally-oriented courses, where students need to study formally the rules and conventions of ethical behaviour in their fields, there is also a great deal of potential to teach values education informally, through mentoring, role modelling and encouraging behavioural change and values adjustment.

The student Whole Person Development program conducted by Student Development Services exemplifies the informal approach to values education in CityU. This program encourages students to participate in a wide variety of non-academic activities and organizes special seminars and workshops on different aspects of whole-person development.

What we are attempting to achieve in this project is a complementary middle ground between these completely formal and informal approaches. Since students spend a significant portion of their time interacting with their teachers in the classroom, the learning environment that teachers create can be directly used to reinforce universal human values on a daily basis. Writers such as Jennings and Nelson (1996) have described the 'values across the curriculum' approach, in which values education is being removed from the exclusive domain of ethics courses and instead integrated into a wide range of curriculum areas. Noddings (1991) suggests that a useful starting point can be to encourage university educators to discuss and even question their own practices in order to clarify their own values and to understand the values implicit in their actions. This can help them to address questions such as (Dhall and Dhall, 1999, p.2), 'Will our teaching result in what we hope will happen for our students? Are we following "enabling" practices that will empower our students, our colleagues and ourselves? How can we change our practices and attitudes to lead towards more professional and personal self-fulfilment?' The ultimate aim of the project is to raise self-awareness by encouraging reflection on these questions and promoting practical applications that will enable CityU teachers to become 'effective agents of human values and thus of transformational dynamics' (Dhall and Dhall, p.8).

Description of the project

The project has two aims. First, we aim to create an understanding of the current (explicit and implicit) values education practices and related areas of concern of CityU teachers, and promote awareness of values education among CityU teachers, The second aim is to provide some practical strategies that teachers from different disciplines can incorporate into their learning environments to facilitate the practice and reinforcement of universal human values. Teachers can use such strategies to enhance their students' self-esteem, the desire to choose between right and wrong, team spirit and co-operation and encourage students to think about the purpose and goal of their life and how university education can contribute to this goal.

The students will benefit from this project through the enhanced quality of teaching and improved interaction with their teachers. An important feature of this project is its *universality*. Since our objective is to enhance the development of universal human values,

we will focus on strategies that teachers from different disciplines can use to cultivate a learning environment in which basic human values can be nurtured.

Framework

The framework for the project is based on the Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (SSEHV) model. This originated in India, now operates successfully in more than 160 countries, and is supported by national education department policies in several countries including India, Thailand and the United Kingdom. It is a secular programme based on a matrix of five human values that correspond to the five domains of the human personality and five dynamic, interactive teaching techniques.

The SSEHV model promotes five universal, secular human values: truth, right action, peace, love and non-violence. Each of the five values corresponds to a different dimension of human development, with the ultimate goal of developing the 'whole' student, not only the cognitive and physical aspects, as summarised in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Sathya Sai Model of Values Education

Value	Dimension of Student's Personality	For example:
Truth	Cognitive (knowing and understanding)	accuracy, curiosity, discrimination, honesty, human understanding, integrity, self-reflection, sincerity
Right Action	Physical (engaging in action)	courage, dependability, efficiency, endurance, independent initiative, determination, perseverance, ethical behaviour
Peace	Emotional (inner vision)	calmness, concentration, optimism, self-acceptance, self-discipline, self-esteem
Love	Higher Consciousness (intuition)	compassion, consideration, forgiveness, humaneness, interdependence, selflessness, tolerance
Non-violence	Spiritual (unity with every component of the Universe)	benevolence, co-operation, respect for diversity, unity, concern for ecological balance, respect for life, respect for property

The project will be conducted in two phases, the first of which is nearing completion at the time of writing this draft. The first phase will involve the use of questionnaires to determine university teachers' and students' feelings and beliefs about values education being a component of university education, either explicitly or implicitly, and their feelings about a number of common academic or student behaviours. The second phase will be the development of a web-based professional development programme intended to offer some pragmatic solutions for the major problems facing academics and students within the university.

Phase 1

In the first phase of the project questionnaires, designed specifically for this project, was administered to about 100 randomly-selected teaching staff and 247 students. The students were from the classes of those academics in the sample who volunteered to allow

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administration during their class time. At the time of writing this draft, 63 completed questionnaires had been returned from the teachers, representing a response rate of about 63%. These questionnaires comprised 58 and 42 Likert-type items respectively. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement a statement on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicated 'Strong Disagreement' with that statement. The purpose of these questionnaires was to investigate the awareness and current practices of CityU teachers with regards to values education.

Questionnaire results

Our questionnaires addressed a wide range of issues related to various aspects of values education. The results of the analyses will be reported fully elsewhere. Here we essentially confine our analysis to two issues – the relevance of values education at the university level and how values education ought to be implemented at the university level. Figures 3 and 4 summarise the results of the teachers' opinions on these two issues, respectively, whereas Figures 5 and 6 contain analogous results from the students' perspective. These figures contain summary statistics and histograms showing the distribution of responses to various statements.

The first panel of Figure 3 indicates that nearly 75% of teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) that contemporary HK society has lost sight of basic human values. The second panel shows that 84% of the teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) that a responsible tertiary institution should be concerned with students' character development. The last panel indicates that 81% of teachers agreed (or strongly agreed) that university academics should reflect on the values they are conveying to students. A simple t-test of the null hypothesis that the mean response equals 4 is not significant at the conventional levels for all three statements, and the median response for all three is also 4. These results are strongly suggestive of agreement on the relevance of values education at the tertiary level by teachers.

The first and second panels of Figure 4 suggest that academics were generally neutral regarding whether values education should be implemented directly through a special course or indirectly through utilisation of appropriate examples. The mean response is not significantly different from 3 (neutral) for both the statements. By contrast, the third panel finds support for the idea that values education should be implemented indirectly through leadership and modelling by lecturers and tutors. Nearly 60% of the respondents agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement, and the null hypothesis that the mean response is 4 cannot be rejected.

The first two panels of Figure 5 show the results for the relevance of values education as perceived by students. Nearly 40% of the students disagreed (or strongly disagreed) with the statement that universities should not worry about values education, 20% agreed (or strongly agreed), whereas the rest were neutral. Overall, however, we cannot reject the null hypothesis that the mean student response was neutral. The second panel of Figure 5 shows that more than 75% of the students agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement that their teachers should practice good values.

The first panel of Figure 6 shows that students tended to be neutral to the idea of implementing values education through a special course. We cannot reject the null hypothesis that the mean response is 3 (neutral). The median response is also 3. The second

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panel indicates that there is some support for the strategy of showing examples of good values during lectures. The mean response is 3.48, which is significantly greater than 3, and nearly 53% of the students agreed (or strongly agreed) with the statement. The median response is 4, also indicating agreement. The third panel of Figure 6 is nearly identical to the second, and again it indicates support for implementing values education indirectly through role modelling and leadership by the teachers.

Different perceptions

Generally the teachers indicated that they perceived themselves to be promoting aspects of values education in their interactions with their students. For example, they gave mean responses greater than 4 ('agree') to statements that included:

- It is a university lecturer's responsibility to encourage students to be honest with their teachers and others (4.3).
- I always encourage my students to speak openly and honestly to me regarding the problems they face (4.5).
- I feel comfortable to admit my mistakes in front of students (4.3).
- I consciously try to develop positive self-esteem and self-confidence in my students (4.1).
- Students need to see that we (teachers) genuinely care for them (4.4).

However, the students' mean ratings indicated that they were neutral in their perceptions of their teachers' behaviour, with all mean ratings falling in the range between 2 ('disagree') and 4 ('agree'). When asked to make open comments about the most serious problem experienced in their interactions, many of the teachers listed their students' lack of motivation and self-discipline for learning and self-development beyond studying for examination. The most common responses listed by the students included lecturers being too busy or too difficult to find to ask for help, and lack of 'approachability' in the teacher's demeanour.

Two-sample t-tests were used to compare the mean ratings of teachers and students on items that were similar in nature. While these comparisons must be interpreted with caution, due to the fact that the items were similar but not identical in the constructs they were intended to measure, they do give some insights into some of the similarities and differences in the perceptions held by staff and students about values-related issues. From a selection of the statistically significant results shown in Table 1, it can be seen that some interesting discrepancies occurred between staff and student opinions about the following:

- Teachers indicated that they saw both minor and major acts of plagiarism as more serious offences that the students perceived them to be. In fact, the students' mean rating (3.0) indicated that they were neutral about the seriousness of major acts of plagiarism.
- Students gave a higher rating of their punctuality in coming to class than was the teachers' perception of this.
- Teachers have a higher perception of students' respect for them than that held by students of the extent to which they are respected by their teachers.
- Students have a higher perception than their teachers do of their self-directedness as learners.
- Students are more upset by critical feedback than the teachers perceive them to be.

- Teachers rate themselves higher than their students rate them for encouraging the development of student self-esteem.
- Teachers think they put more effort into giving constructive assignment feedback than the students perceive them to.
- Students were more inclined to believe that in an argument the teacher would not admit to the student being right.
- Teachers agreed in principle that they should be tolerant towards students with genuine problems, whilst the student rating of the actual practice was ambivalent.

These differences in perception highlight the need for teachers and students to acquire a better understanding of each other's roles and expectations. Our professional development programme will address this important issue in detail.

To summarise, the results of preliminary analyses of the questionnaires indicate broad agreement, by both teachers and students, with the idea that values education is important at the university level. Further, the evidence also suggests that values education ought be implemented via appropriate role modelling by the teachers, rather than through a specific course.

Phase 2

The second phase will be the development of a web-based professional development package that will address the issues identified in the questionnaires. This package will be derived from the outcomes of a series of focus group interviews/workshops with staff and students from various disciplines.

The framework for the package adapts and generalizes the work of Dhall and Dhall (1999) to a university environment. It is not concerned with teaching academics how to teach, or teaching students how to learn, as there already exist programmes that take care of those needs. Rather, it is to encourage them to reflect on how the way in which they interact with each other impacts upon such aspects of the students' lives as their character development, self-esteem and personal empowerment.

We will conduct focus group interviews/workshops divided into two parts. The first part of the workshop will be conducted jointly with teachers and students. Given the differences in behavioural perceptions highlighted in our survey results, it seems important to provide a forum where students and teachers can come together to share their experiences and reflect on the difficulties they encounter in their interactions. This will also help reduce the hierarchical barriers between students and teachers that often stifle the flow of communication in Asian schools. Because we are dealing with adults and young adults, they do not need to be 'taught' how to interact in appropriate ways, so the focus of the workshops will be on sharing experiences and self-reflection. In the second stage of the workshop, students and teachers will meet in separate groups to share their own insights that have been derived from the discussion activities and to formulate an action plan that will be feasible to implement in their practice.

The workshop material will be presented in a web-based format for other academic institutions that may wish to develop similar programmes as well as for those academics who

are too busy to participate in workshops but still wish to incorporate values education in their teaching. The website will provide guidelines for those who wish to work together in a face-to-face setting, and an online environment that will enable academics to share and reflect on others' experiences. The purpose is not to impart techniques, but to lead to insights that will make participants better equipped to influence the dynamics both inside and outside the classroom (Dhall and Dhall, p.261). It is envisaged that there will be four levels of the package, as outlined in Figure 2.   The first level will introduce each of the respective values and describes its potential implications for university teaching. At the second level, self-awareness will be generated through discussion and reflection on topics/issues that have been identified by the staff and student questionnaires as important or contentious.   These discussions will be supported as appropriate by links to resources that will include case studies of good practices, articles, and relevant websites. The package will include provision for ongoing follow-up in which participants can discuss the outcomes of their action plan implementation in an online chat group.

Figure 2: Outline of package
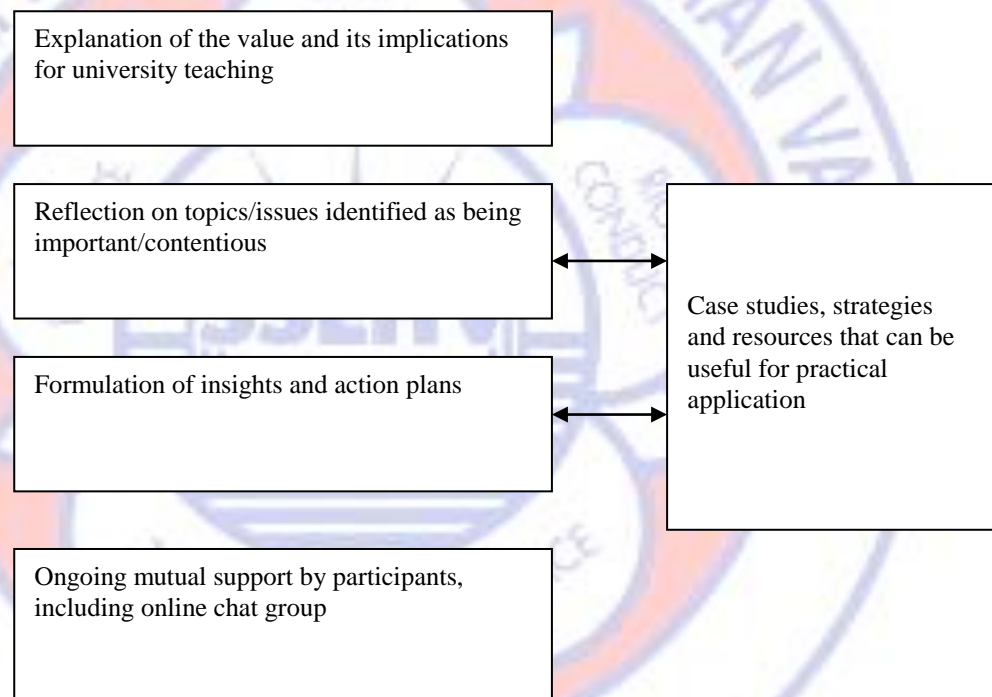
Conclusion

From the questionnaire results presented in this paper, it can be seen that it is generally accepted that values education should be an integral component of university education at CityU and that this should be addressed by indirect modelling of appropriate behaviours. However, there are some areas in which there were discrepancies between the perceptions of the teaching staff and the students about each others' behaviours. Consequently, these questionnaire outcomes indicate that there is sufficient concern about the need for values education at CityU to justify continuing with the second phase of the project in order to bridge these gaps for the mutual benefit of both students and staff.

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About the authors

Dr. Vikas Kakkar and Dr. Margaret Taplin are Assistant Professor and Research Fellow respectively in the Department of Economics and Finance at the City University of Hong Kong. Both are involved in the promotion of values education at all levels, and have a particular interest in the implications for promoting it at tertiary level.

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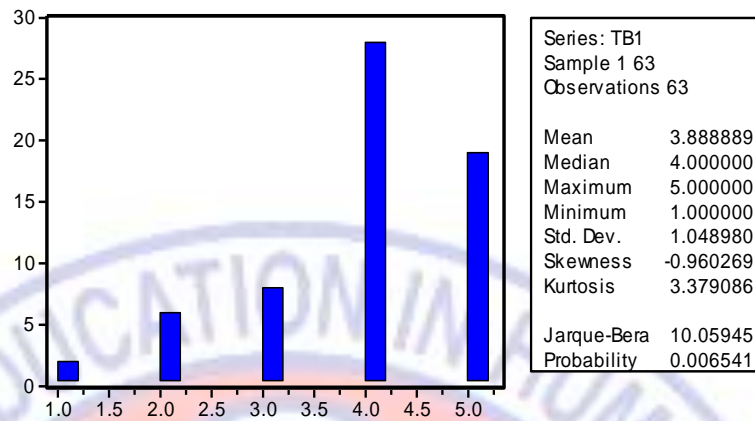
Table 1: Comparison of teachers' and students' mean responses to items measuring similar constructs

Teacher Item	Teacher Mean (N=63)	SD	Student Item	Student Mean (N=247)	SD	t* (df= 308)
I don't worry about relatively 'small' acts of plagiarism.	2.0	1.1	It is acceptable to copy small parts of an assignment directly from a classmate or the Internet	3.4	0.9	10.46
I treat an obvious case of plagiarism as a serious offence.	4.2	0.8	I believe it is a serious offence to copy an assignment from the Internet or other sources.	3.0	1.1	8.37
My students generally come into class punctually.	2.7	1.7	I usually arrive in the classroom on time.	3.5	1.1	5.1
My students behave respectfully towards me.	3.9	0.8	My teachers treat me with respect.	3.5	0.7	2.26
My students are able to be self-directed in their learning.	2.8	0.7	I can learn well independently of my teachers.	3.4	0.7	4.58
In my experience, students are likely to become angry or lose motivation when I give them honest but critical feedback.	2.5	1.3	I become upset if my teachers criticize my work.	3.1	0.9	3.73
I consciously try to develop positive self-esteem and self-confidence in my students.	4.1	0.8	My teachers give me encouragement and a high sense of self-esteem.	3.2	0.6	7.25
I put a lot of effort into marking my students' assignments because this is a way that I can help them grow.	3.9	1.0	Our teachers put a lot of effort into giving us useful feedback on our assignments.	3.2	0.7	6.06
In a conflict with a student I will persist until I feel I have emerged as the winner.	2.1	0.7	If I have a disagreement with my teachers, they will not admit I am right even if it is true.	2.7	0.7	4.94
I should be tolerant towards my students when they have genuine problems that interfere with their studies.	4.3	0.5	My teachers are kind towards me when I have genuine problems that interfere with my studies.	3.3	0.5	9.9

*significant, p<0.05

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Figure 3

ntemporary HK society is excessively competitive and materialistic, and therefore has lost sight of basic human values.

Series: TB1	
Sample 1 63	
Observations 63	
Mean	3.888889
Median	4.000000
Maximum	5.000000
Minimum	1.000000
Std. Dev.	1.048980
Skewness	-0.960269
Kurtosis	3.379086
Jarque-Bera	10.05945
Probability	0.006541

A responsible tertiary institution should be concerned with students' character development.

Series: TB2	
Sample 1 63	
Observations 63	
Mean	4.253968
Median	4.000000
Maximum	5.000000
Minimum	2.000000
Std. Dev.	0.761329
Skewness	-0.678378
Kurtosis	2.757947
Jarque-Bera	4.985870
Probability	0.082667

University academics should reflect on the values they are conveying to students.

Series: TB3	
Sample 1 63	
Observations 62	
Mean	4.177419
Median	4.000000
Maximum	5.000000
Minimum	2.000000
Std. Dev.	0.840066
Skewness	-0.843561
Kurtosis	3.154341
Jarque-Bera	7.414691
Probability	0.024543

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Figure 4

Values education should be addressed directly at the University level through a specific course on ethical values.
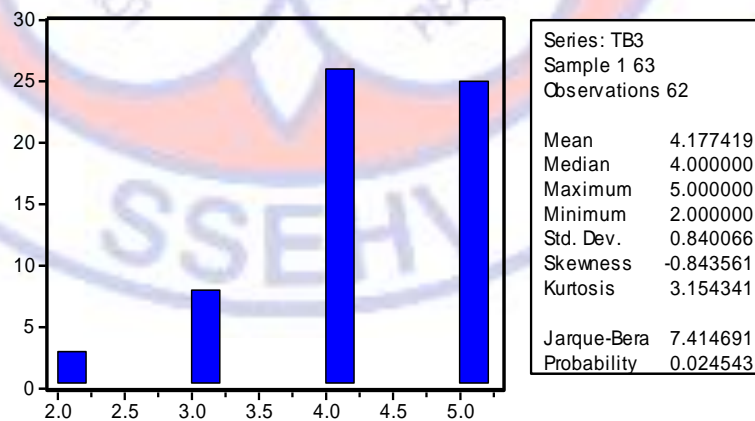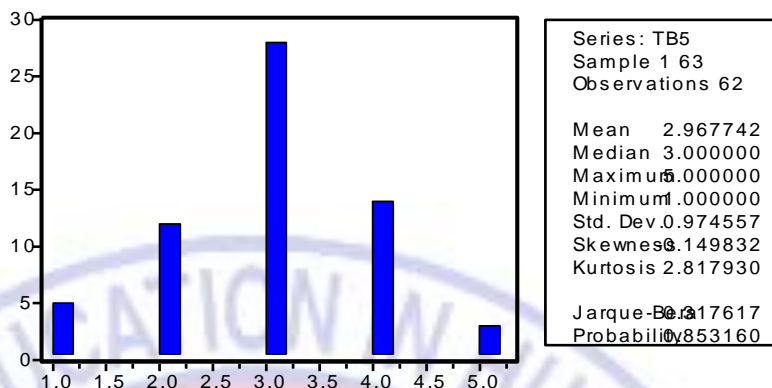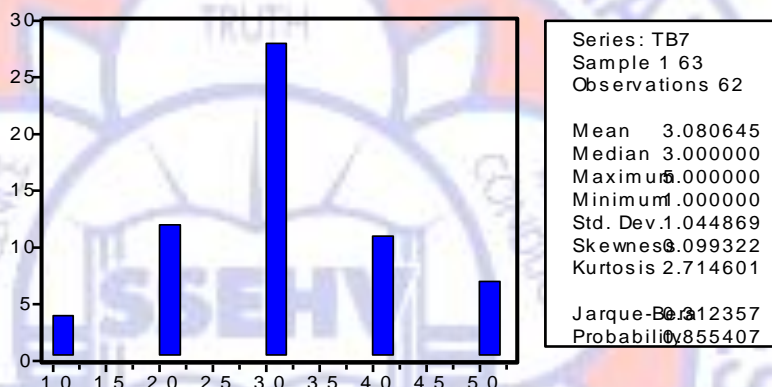

Series: TB5
Sample 1 63
Observations 62

Mean   2.967742
Median 3.000000
Maximum 5.000000
Minimum 1.000000
Std. Dev. 0.974557
Skewness 0.149832
Kurtosis 2.817930

Jarque-Bera 0.317617
Probability 0.853160

...ation should be addressed indirectly at the University level through utilising appropriate examples but not discussing th...

Series: TB7
Sample 1 63
Observations 62

Mean   3.080645
Median 3.000000
Maximum 5.000000
Minimum 1.000000
Std. Dev. 1.044869
Skewness 0.099322
Kurtosis 2.714601

Jarque-Bera 0.312357
Probability 0.855407

...es education should be addressed indirectly at the University level through leadership and modelling by lecturers and tu...

Series: TB8
Sample 1 63
Observations 62

Mean   3.806452
Median 4.000000
Maximum 5.000000
Minimum 2.000000
Std. Dev. 0.884080
Skewness 0.044650
Kurtosis 2.011578

Jarque-Bera 2.544461
Probability 0.280206

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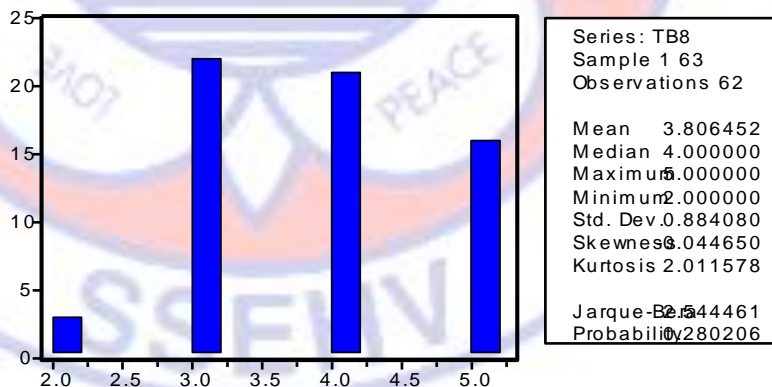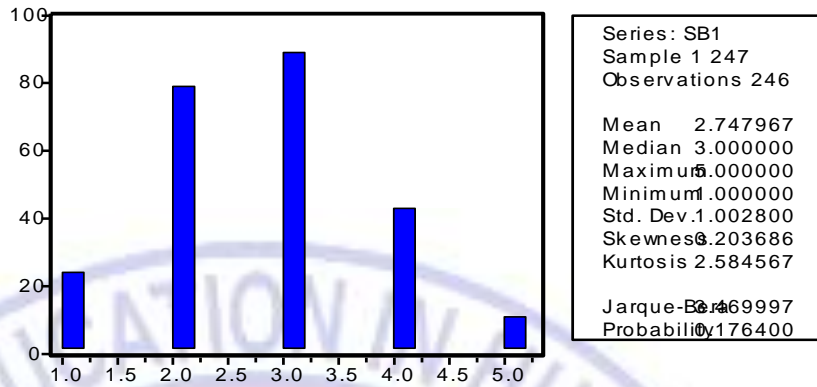
Figure 5

ty students, we already know and practice good values, and it is not the university's responsibility to worry about values


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Series: SB1
Sample 1 247
Observations 246

Mean     2.747967
Median   3.000000
Maximum  5.000000
Minimum  1.000000
Std. Dev. 1.002800
Skewness  0.203686
Kurtosis  2.584567

Jarque-Bera 3.469997
Probability 0.176400
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Our teachers should practice good values because their behavior can affect their students.


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Series: SB2
Sample 1 247
Observations 246

Mean     3.963415
Median   4.000000
Maximum  5.000000
Minimum  1.000000
Std. Dev. 0.778986
Skewness  0.611459
Kurtosis  3.533280

Jarque-Bera 18.24412
Probability 0.000109
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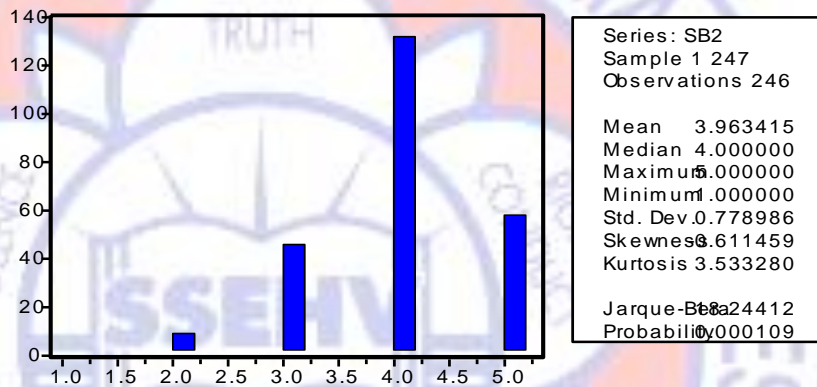
Figure 6

Values education should be taught at the university level through a special course.

Series: SB3
Sample 1 247
Observations 246

Mean   3.126016
Median   3.000000
Maximum   5.000000
Minimum   1.000000
Std. Dev. 0.887771
Skewness   0.178233
Kurtosis   3.337894

Jarque-Bera 2.472715
Probability 0.290440
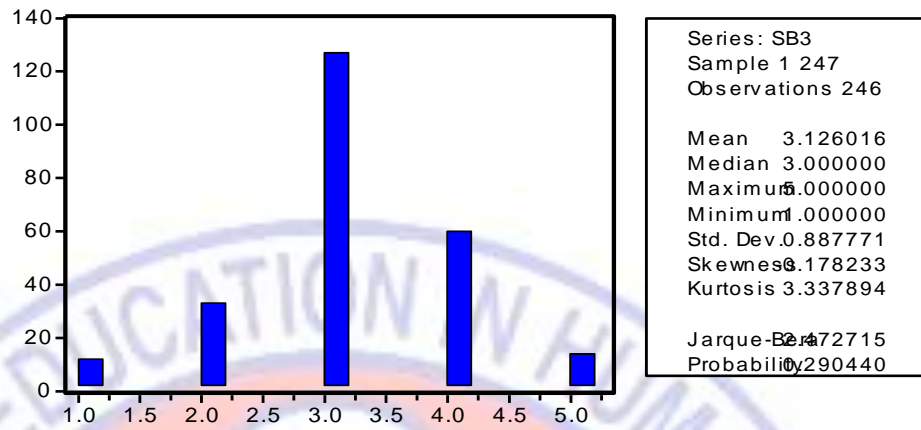
s education should be taught indirectly at the university level through showing good examples of values during lectures.

Series: SB4
Sample 1 247
Observations 245

Mean   3.477551
Median   4.000000
Maximum   5.000000
Minimum   1.000000
Std. Dev. 0.852014
Skewness   0.328296
Kurtosis   3.095020

Jarque-Bera 4.493105
Probability 0.105763
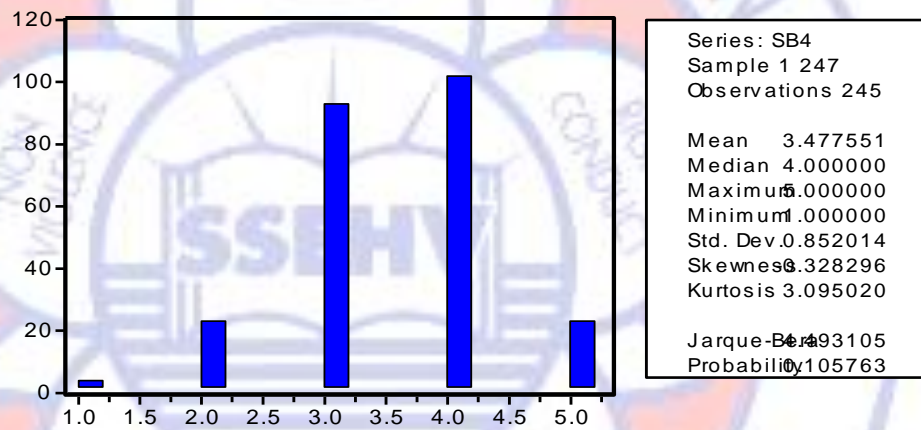
es education should be taught indirectly at the university level by teachers showing us that they practice good values.

Series: SB5
Sample 1 247
Observations 245

Mean   3.465306
Median   3.000000
Maximum   5.000000
Minimum   1.000000
Std. Dev. 0.827189
Skewness   0.259305
Kurtosis   3.042476

Jarque-Bera 2.764020
Probability 0.251073

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