

LIVING VALUES - ONE PRIMARY SCHOOL'S WAY OF ENCOURAGING A VALUES-BASED EDUCATION

Neil Hawkes and Linda Heppenstall

Picture on the screen of your mind a class of 10-year olds sitting with their teacher during 'circle time'. The topic under discussion is, 'are we basically good or bad?' Pupils are used to this format and listen attentively to each other, whilst respecting differing opinions. No one feels nervous or anticipates being put down but freely offer their thoughts in an atmosphere of quiet reflection, as the teacher guides pupils to consider at greater depth their initial thoughts.

'Well, I think that we are naturally bad', says Mark. 'It is only parents and teachers that make us good!'

'I don't think that is so,' says Lisa, 'for I think that we are born good and it is only things like television that make us bad.'

'Perhaps you are both right', says Amy. 'I think that we can be both, although I prefer to be good because I like the feelings I have when I'm being good.'

So this discussion continues. The children appreciate that there are no right or wrong answers, and that the opinions of others must be taken seriously in these lessons, which give them an opportunity to discuss core values which underpin their lives.

The attention of schools has recently been drawn to a consideration of issues concerned with the spiritual, moral, social and cultural aspects of the curriculum. *Ofsted* now inspect schools under this heading and there has been a great deal of debate, which has been highlighted in the press about the need for schools to give due emphasis to ethical questions. It sometimes appears that schools have been ignoring these important areas! Most schools throughout the United Kingdom are conscious of their responsibilities - indeed some have considered them so important that whole school policies focused on values education have become central to their work.

In this short article we, as teachers at the school, don't want to give the impression that West Kidlington School has found the answers to the complex issues that make modern living so difficult, but we have been determined to build a school climate that is quite explicit about a set of values which we believe can be universally accepted, as they are not bound by the context of a particular culture or specific religion. At school we have given a great deal of thought to the values that we are trying to promote. We regularly consider these core values and how the school can sustain an ethos that supports the pupil as a reflective learner and promotes quality teaching and learning. We are so very aware that Society is faced with enormously complicated problems that make growing-up a very difficult process. Children are constantly bombarded with negative messages that adversely affect their mental, emotional and spiritual development. They live in a society that continues to condition them to believe two particular myths: the first is that if they work hard they will get a good job, which will pay them a lot of money and then they will live happily ever after! The second is that happiness is found in the world outside of themselves. If they feel unhappy, then the answer is to watch the television, go to a disco or buy something! Disillusionment soon sets in as pupils learn that no amount of temporary excitement or gratification can lead to a feeling of inner contentment. They are repeatedly being given the impression that happiness is totally obtainable from a material world.

Children are conditioned to believe that 'things' will provide happiness. They are generally encouraged to experience life in a world totally external to their inner selves - a world which is full of noise and constant activity. Impressions of society being violent and selfish leave their mark as the child develops into adolescence. Symptoms of pupil stress are seen as children find it difficult to listen attentively and give schoolwork their full concentration. Social

relationships suffer as the child often fails to appreciate that building meaningful relationships is their own responsibility.

As a school community, we believe the ethos of the school should be built on a foundation of core values such as honesty, respect, cooperation, happiness, responsibility, tolerance, understanding and peace. These will at times be addressed directly through activities, such as the acts of worship programme, whilst at others they will permeate the whole curriculum. Either way, they are the basis for the social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual and moral development of the whole child. We encourage pupils to consider these values, thereby developing knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to develop as reflective learners and grow to be stable, educated and civil adults.

This is all very well, we hear you say, but surely idealistic if not unrealistic? No! It is the only realistic step that schools can take. We believe that schools should act as leaders in their communities. We cannot wait for society to change or politicians to create a just society. We must, in a humble, open and enabling way, demonstrate that there are other choices that pupils can make in order to grow as autonomous individuals. Also, through the methods adopted by the school, we aim to raise real standards. This is achieved by promoting a school ethos that is underpinned by core values that support the development of the whole child as a reflective learner.

In order to promote effective teaching and learning, staff in the school work together to impart core values. They reflect on the practical implications that these values have for the school community. Pupils are encouraged to reflect on their behaviour in the light of these values. They are helped to understand that if they can think carefully, then their behaviour will be more positive and the quality of their learning will be enhanced. This practice is promoted by the staff encouraging an atmosphere that is calm, purposeful and happy.

Adults listen carefully to the children thereby establishing mutual respect. Time is set aside for staff discussion to ensure that all adults in the school are consistent in their expectations of pupil behaviour.

Staff set good personal examples and model expected behaviour. The pupils know that staff expect positive behaviour of them because boundaries are clearly defined and maintained. These expectations are shared with parents and the community in letters, the school prospectus and the school's home school partnership contract. Time is given for class and school reflection. Silence is an important element of the school's reflective practice and is encouraged, especially during acts of worship.

Other school policies underpin this process, especially those concerned with religious education - the spiritual dimension, teaching and learning, personal and social education and acts of worship.

We are not making any exaggerated claims regarding the beneficial effects that the school is experiencing. We are only too aware of the complex range of social issues that impinge on the life of the school and our tentative steps to address them. However, we believe that if the wider school community supports our approach to teaching and learning, then the benefits for the pupils will be evident by observing their positive behaviour.

How do we teach, encourage and impart values? The following guidelines have been written to support the school's policy on values. They are based on what happens in practice at our school. The guidelines have grown from an appreciation by the staff that the sharing of a common purpose and the adopting of a core set of values sustains an ethos which supports the pupil as a reflective learner and in turn promotes quality teaching and learning.

The guidelines are as follows:

- What the school aims to do related to its curriculum and its purpose
- Our core values
- Identifying some of the basic needs of children

- Describing how the school supports the child as a reflective learner and the benefits that this brings to the quality of learning in the school.

The School's curriculum

The intended curriculum is the medium through which the whole child is educated. All subjects in the curriculum are important during a child's time at school. However, areas of the curriculum that relate to both the spiritual and material world help the child to perceive the subtle interrelationship between the intuitive, emotional and intellectual faculties.

The School's purpose

The purpose of the school is to provide learning and teaching, which responds to the unique educational needs of each child. A calm, happy and purposeful working atmosphere is fostered within a caring community. An active partnership is encouraged between children, parents, governors and teachers. High standards are promoted by expecting pupils to work hard and to persevere in all areas of the curriculum.

Core Values

The following is a list of core values that the school focuses on for a month at a time. These values are referred to during assembly times and at other appropriate times during the day. The monthly value is displayed in large letters in the School Hall. The core value for the month is represented in classrooms through posters, notices, pictures and literature.

	1998/9	1999/0
September	Respect	Quality
October	Responsibility	Unity
November	Tolerance	Peace
December	Thoughtfulness	Happiness
January	Friendship	Hope
February	Love	Patience
March	Courage	Care
April	Appreciation	Humility
May	Honesty	Simplicity
June	Understanding	Trust
July	Co-Operation	Faith

What are the needs of children (and adults)?

In order for the school's purpose to be effective and the above values to be meaningful to the pupils, an understanding of the basic needs of children are appreciated by the staff. To develop fully as people children need:

- to be loved

- security and knowing clearly what is expected of them
- to be valued as people
- a balance of experiences – active / quiet; sound / silence; communicating / reflective; taught skills / exploratory work
- help to develop their own web of relationships
- to develop self-awareness and a knowledge of the world outside of themselves
- creative experiences including external exploration and internal reflection
- to be fully involved in the process of education.

What we do to meet those needs?

Staff, both teaching and non-teaching, always attempt to be consistent in their behaviour and in their expectations of the children. They:

- value all children
- display great patience and listen carefully to children
- focus on and emphasize the positive, in terms of work, habits and behaviour
- face reality and help pupils to come to terms with difficult issues such as death
- only disapprove of poor behaviour, never the child!
- try not to rush, and have time for each other
- are mutually supportive
- are all valued as equal partners in the school
- speak quietly and avoid shouting
- are valued by the governors and community
- have a good sense of humour!
- communicate with parents to ensure that they appreciate the school's values. This then ensures a common understanding.

Activities which are encouraged in the school:

Nursery and Infants

The following activities regularly take place in the Nursery and Key Stage 1 in order to consider our core values and encourage the pupils to be reflective learners:

- encouraging the children to explore feelings and thoughts through drama, religious education, dance, art and story
- time being given for children to be taught creative skills and being given time to use them freely
- exploring the use of senses throughout the curriculum, especially fostering the development of listening skills
- resolving relationship problems through careful and patient discussions
- developing an understanding of the self and others by deliberately focusing on topics such as ourselves
- young children generally feel experiences with their emotions and senses first, so are encouraged to think and talk about their feelings. By talking about feelings and listening to other children talking, the children become more aware of the feelings of *other* people
- recognising that issues concerned with feelings and relationships need to be revisited and expanded as the child matures and gains in experience.

Juniors

The following activities support the policy in Key Stage 2

- considering, hearing about and reflecting on the feelings of others. For instance, the pupil will be encouraged to consider the reasons for his/her feelings and to consider why others feel differently. Listening skills are further developed, and empathy for the views and feelings of others.
- considering issues such as what happiness is, through the programmes of work concerned with writing, language, poetry and religious education. Older children often aren't prepared to speak about their inner thoughts but will commit them to paper if an atmosphere of confidentiality is developed
- developing a class and school climate of trust between teachers and pupils. This can be developed through personal and social education activities such as 'circle time'
- ensuring that class or school acts of worship encourage reflection through stillness and silence.
- encouraging the pupils to consider situations that require critical evaluation leading to decision-making and the assessment of the consequences of particular choices.

Skills

Throughout the school the development of the following skills are encouraged which contribute to reflective thinking about our values:

- displaying helpful politeness and good manners to all at school and visitors to the school
- speaking quietly and politely to others
- listening carefully and thinking about what others are saying
- reflection
- empathy and tolerance
- using imagination
- visualization techniques
- stillness
- being able to express feelings constructively, thereby learning to manage feelings and resolve conflicts through discussion, understanding and practice
- articulating thoughts clearly in order to enhance communication skills
- walking quietly about the school building
- developing positive attitudes to work and play
- accepting personal responsibility for actions
- care and respect of other peoples' property.

Activities that we promote to encourage reflective skills

- creating a peaceful climate in the classroom and looking for and creating peaceful places on the school site, e.g. the trail and nature areas
- taking children to beautiful, peaceful places and encouraging them to value them
- pupils setting their own targets for work and behaviour
- pupils involved in the assessment of their own work
- giving opportunities for decision making
- school behaviour policy that clearly defines how the school puts emphasis on behaving well and positive thinking
- giving time in class for pupils to respond to some of the 'basic' needs within us, e.g. friendship, cooperation, love, thereby clarifying their understanding of values

- allowing children to sit in silence to think through their own thoughts (not only sitting working in silence)
- helping the children to be relaxed and unstressed but focused on their activities, including visualization as a teaching technique to help in the development of the imagination and memory
- opportunities for role-play so that skills associated with negotiation, cooperation and assertiveness are developed. This helps pupils to understand the potential consequences of giving way to peer pressure.

Benefits for the Pupils

The benefits that we are *beginning* to see because we are expecting the pupils to be reflective about core values are:

- children behaving more calmly and purposefully
- children able to concentrate and reflect more on their own behaviour
- children being more self-aware and self-accepting
- children being more considerate to others and less ego-centred
- children taking a greater responsibility for their own behaviour and realising that they have choices
- the improvement of listening skills
- pupils getting more from their lessons because they are thinking more before taking action
- the improvement of self-confidence and self-esteem
- pupils knowing themselves better and being able to relate to others more effectively.

Useful teaching resources

The following books and materials are used in the school:

- Turn Your School Around - Jenny Mosley L.D.A. ISBN 1/85503/174/4
- Co-operation in the Classroom - Brahma Kumaris, World Spiritual University, Nuneham Courtney, Oxon. OX44 9PG
- Don't just do something sit there - Mary K. Stone. RMEP ISBN 1/85175/105/X
- Values and Visions - Sally Burns and George & Anne Lamont. Hodder & Stoughton ISBN 0340/64412/5
- Living Values - Brahma Kumaris World Spiritual University
- Skills for the Primary Child – TACADE
- Education in Human Values - The Human Values Foundation, Lower Wallbridge Farmhouse, Dowlish Wake, Ilminster Somerset TA19 ONZ

Conclusion

These guidelines describe how the school uses core values as a basis for its work. The success of our approach to teaching and learning is not easily measured but is evident in the personal qualities that pupils display in the community and by the school's positive and happy ethos. Currently, we are working to produce a spiritual tool kit for teachers. In this kit we are identifying elements of good teaching practice that promotes values education. This tool kit will be available later this year.

We hope that we have encouraged those who are already engaged in this type of work to continue and those who are perhaps considering it to roll-up their sleeves and to have a go! Remember that the most important element is the goodwill of the staff and to build your values

work on what is happening in the school. It will fail to get off the ground if you write a policy that doesn't match reality. Best of luck!

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About the authors:

Neil Hawkes was head teacher, West Kidlington School, Oxford, from 1993 – 1999. He is now a senior education advisor for Oxfordshire County Council and an international consultant for values education

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