



## **A Quiet Revolution: placing positive values at the heart of the curriculum**

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*A society holds together through the quality of its shared values (virtues), which are produced through a shared conversation. (Sachs, 1997)*

What appears to be missing from many schools and society at large is a shared vocabulary, based on shared positive human values, which can provide a sense of direction and vision about how to create a stable moral society.

The purpose of this paper is to argue that teaching about positive human values (e.g. respect, honesty, compassion, care, humility and responsibility) improves the quality of education in schools. It seeks to promote an educational philosophy based on valuing self and others, through the consideration of a values vocabulary (principles that guide behaviour) as the basis of good educational practice. This process is called Values Education which can be further described as:

*a way of conceptualising education that places the search for meaning and purpose at the heart of the educational process. It recognises that the recognition, worth and integrity of all involved in the life and work of the school, are central to the creation of a values-based learning community that fosters positive relationships and quality in education. (Alive, 2007)*

My experience, as Headteacher of West Kidlington School in the UK, is that when a school seriously develops the moral and spiritual aspects of the curriculum (that is, those that positively contribute to the inner world of thoughts, feelings and emotions of the teacher and the pupil), the school community become more reflective and harmonious. The effect on individual pupils, of developing Values Education, is that pupils take greater personal responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

My research, undertaken at Oxford University (Hawkes, 2005), indicates that the most effective teachers of values are those who work to be more self-aware and

take time to reflect on the deeper meaning of the values being emphasised in the school. Self-reflective work by teachers is seen to have a powerful impact on pupils, who appear to make a connection between what the teacher says and what she does.

Such teachers are authentic, meaning that they seek to achieve congruence between their thoughts, feelings and actions. They are aware that they have the potential (as we all do) to be consumed by negative emotion (e.g. anger) and for this to be inappropriately translated into action. Developing *reflection* as a tool to aid self-control enables both pupil and adult to behave in ways that reflect positive human values, such as compassion and respect.

Teachers describe their own positive behaviour as *walking their talk: living their values*. Such reflective work leads to teachers developing a deepening understanding of the values words. They also have a clearer perception of their own attitudes and behaviour, and seem willing and able to model the values. Teachers believe that the pupils will learn from their positive example. Therefore an outcome of my research is the view that the process of Values Education must begin with adults (what could be described as the work before the work), before adopting it in the curriculum.

From the evidence, it would appear that Values Education cannot be taught in isolation from the teacher's own thoughts, feelings and behaviour. It is therefore important for all who work with children to pay attention to looking after themselves, physically, mentally and spiritually. Such wise selfishness then enables the adult to be a positive role model.

Teaching about values affects teachers thinking, and consequently the way that they teach. Teachers are not neutral with regards to values, as values are embedded within their attitudes and exhibited through their behaviour. This implies that, in order for there to be consensus and consistency of staff expectations and behaviour throughout the school, a whole school Values Education policy needs to be introduced, based on my *blueprint* for Values Education.

The school's *blueprint* has become an inspiration for other schools world-wide.

1. The whole school community (staff, pupils, parents and community representatives) is involved in shaping the values education policy.
2. A process of values identification takes place involving the school's community. A meeting/forum is set up to facilitate this process.
3. Core positive values (e.g. respect, honesty and co-operation) are identified. These are chosen through a careful process, which involves

- thinking about what qualities (values) the school should encourage the pupils to develop. The West Kidlington model has twenty-two values introduced over a two-year cycle – one value each month. Schools may decide to have fewer values.
4. In the light of the values identified, the school decides the principles that will guide the way adults behave. Elements will be discussed to determine these such as:
    - how adults will care for themselves and each other
    - the emotional literacy of adults
    - the needs of the pupils
    - the way pupils are treated
  5. Adults in the school commit themselves to work towards being role models for Values Education.
  6. The school's institutional values (i.e. how the school is perceived by the community through aspects such as how parents are welcomed) are reviewed to ensure consistency with the Values Education Policy.
  7. The school considers how it will encourage reflective practices that will lead to values-based behaviour, such as silent sitting, active listening and the consideration of ethical dilemmas.
  8. A programme is established for learning about values, which may include:
    - introducing values in a programme of assemblies;
    - one value being highlighted each month;
    - each class teacher preparing one value lesson each month;
    - the value of the month being the subject of a prominent display in the school hall and in each classroom;
    - newsletters to parents, explaining what the value of the month is and how they can be developed at home.
    - aspects of the curriculum (everything the school does) are identified that could make a specific contribution to Values Education. The range of skills, knowledge, attitudes and understanding to develop in the pupils is established. Of crucial importance is to ensure that the process of developing Values Education is well planned, monitored, evaluated and celebrated in order to keep the process alive and constantly under review.

The blueprint enables a school to create a structure for Values Education that fosters a climate for learning that makes the role of teachers easier. Teachers believe that the reason for this is that Values Education fosters good interpersonal relationships. They consider that consequently this helps to raise pupil self-esteem and confidence. The result is that the pupils produce quality work, respect staff and are well behaved.

Teachers in values-based schools report that teaching about values has a positive effect on what they term, the inner world of pupils. They think that by talking about their feelings, pupils learn to express themselves more clearly, control their behaviour, and empathise with others (all aspects concerned with the development of emotional maturity). The teachers believe that the pupils learn about values by talking about them in the context of good teacher-child relationships. They believe that repetition and reinforcement of the values words, across the curriculum, is important for reinforcing their meaning.

The evidence to show that the pupils understand the values is demonstrated by their use of them in everyday conversations. Pupils appear more aware of their behaviour in the playground and out of school. This contributes to the establishment of a positive climate for teaching and learning.

An important conclusion of my research concerns the introduction and development of a values vocabulary. This vocabulary acts as the platform on which pupils and staff develop, and deepen, their understanding of issues concerned with ethics and morality. It appears that the systematic introduction of a common vocabulary encourages reflective thinking, which leads to more positive and ethically-based behaviour. Also, frequent repetition and regular discussion about values reinforces their meaning, with the result that they are more likely to be internalised in the sub-conscious. This in turn reinforces the pupils' positive dispositions and acts as a check on behaviour.

Values-based schools aim to encourage pupils to be reflective by teaching a technique called *reflection* or *silent sitting*, which gives space and time for pupils to focus their minds, allowing their intrapersonal intelligence to be enhanced. Pupils are seen to be able to sit still in personal reflection for extended periods of time, a perceived outcome being that they became more aware of their capacity to determine their own behaviour in a positive way.

The evidence indicates that the success of this is influenced by the staff modelling the behaviour. In school assemblies, for instance, staff model the behaviour expected of the pupils. The pupils therefore model their behaviour on that of the teachers. Teachers believe that if they are reflective it has a positive influence on their own behaviour, enabling them to be more effective.

Teachers consider that they are more careful about how they present ideas to children because of Values Education. They maintain positive attitudes that give affirmation and positive reinforcement to the pupils. The teachers believe that the pupils were more likely to reach their academic potential in a class with values-based discipline.

A key aspect of Values Education appears to be a greater emphasis on the development of good quality relationships between staff and parents. The teachers recognise the vital importance of the role of families in educating children. They emphasise the importance of developing open, sensitive, active, positive teacher-parent relationships. The development of Values Education is shared with parents through newsletters and parents' evenings. This ensures a positive partnership between home and school.

### **Recommendations**

The following recommendations are made that, if adopted, will support the development of a culture in schools of *valuing*, based on Values Education.

1. The concept of Values Education should be considered as an agreed set of principles and practices that underpin all aspects of a school's life and work.
2. Effective Values Education should be centred on the understanding that without appropriate values words pupils find ethical thought difficult to access. Therefore Values Education should be based on the introduction of a common values vocabulary, defined by the school and considered as a vital precursor for the creation of a values-based school community, and expressed in a statement of values.
3. The headteacher (Principal) should give empathy and full support to the consistent application of Values Education.

The key to effective Values Education begins with the role and person of the teacher. The teacher, in terms of his/her own identity and integrity, is the prime instrument for modelling Values Education. Consequently, teacher education should consider Values Education as integral to its provision.

5. Teachers should not only be appropriately trained but also nurtured and cared for, by themselves and each other.
6. Schools should be encouraged to be values-based learning communities and classrooms should be encouraged to be values-based learning environments.

7. Schools should consider the benefits of reflection, which include finding a meaning and purpose in life, the development of understanding, critical thinking, self-awareness and consideration of the self and others. Reflection should be considered as a means of creating the space and time for pupils to realise that they have the freedom to choose their attitude and behaviour. In providing time for *silent sitting*, we give pupils the opportunity to be reflective learners. No other part of the curriculum is concerned so specifically with the internal world of the child, and hence with developing this faculty.
8. The school community should see Values Education as underpinning the whole curriculum and life of the school (not just as part of its rules and regulations) in order to improve the overall quality of education.
9. Schools should develop an holistic view of people (teachers, pupils and others) as thinking and valuable (*human beings*, not *human doings*), and should develop an holistic approach to education and schooling, addressing the needs of the whole person.
10. Schools should see positive relationships as essential for the creation and maintenance of a values-based climate for learning

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