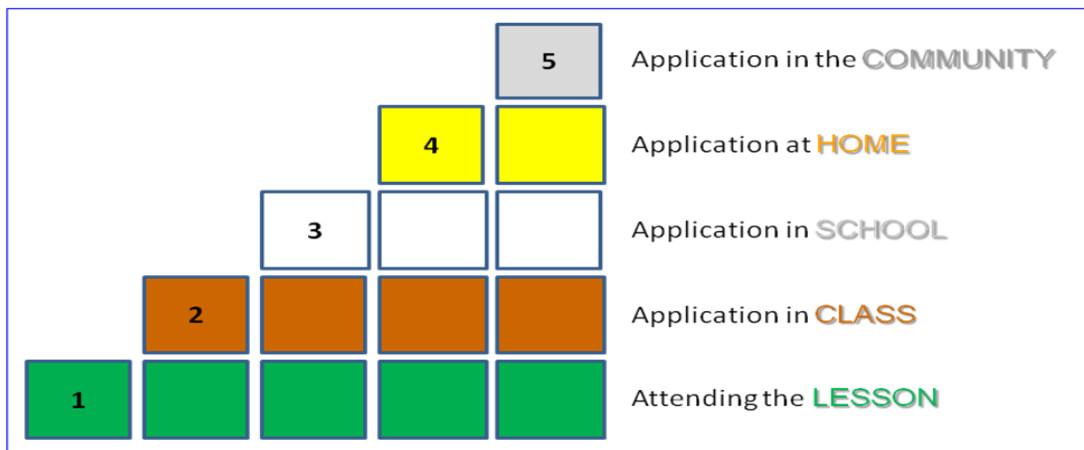


VALUES-THEMED ARTICLE: March 2014

**Building capacity to learn and succeed
with a 5-star education system**



Progress Levels and Points Earned:

Green - 1, Bronze - 2, Silver - 3, Gold - 4, Platinum - 5

Learning is engaging when children and young people are stimulated and excited by it and see the relevance of it. They are constantly making decisions and it's helpful for them to begin to understand and become aware of the drivers for their choices. Take for a moment, what it was that made you decide to get out of bed this morning! You will probably soon find that there were some key factors - things that you personally value and consider important. So, how can we help young citizens enjoy making connections while they are learning so that they can develop a consistent approach to their thinking, decision-making, choices and behaviour - and ultimately feel happy and achieve their full potential?

One way is to take a whole-of-school approach to promoting 'values' literacy - the understanding and application of values in everyday life - involving a deliberate, cross-curricular philosophy and extending learning beyond the

classroom. This helps children better understand themselves, others and the world around them. They become increasingly aware of the power of values, how chosen values influence people's everyday lives and how they themselves can begin to develop and master vital social and emotional skills that can enhance all areas of their lives. This approach brings the entire school community closer together and enables staff to become more conscious of their individual and collective roles in widening everyone's appreciation of the significance and driving forces of values.

Advantages and benefits from embedding values literacy

With a cohesive and collaborative strategy towards developing a fluency in values, by degrees staff, who are also active, enthusiastic learners, become more proficient in, for example:

- understanding the importance of taking a joined-up approach to values education - an ingredient in the curriculum that underpins, cements, integrates and enriches all learning
- promoting values literacy as a vital life skill applicable to all aspects of their pupils' lives, be it their personal endeavours, their relationships, their place in and contribution towards society and how they care for and protect the environment
- feeling confident about how to coach pupils in exploring and applying a wide spectrum of values within their particular subject areas
- recognising where their subject curriculum crosses with the values curriculum and how to build appropriate links between them
- encouraging children and young people to continue to learn more about and consciously apply life-enriching values wherever they find themselves.

Experience and research confirm that the outcomes from good, systematic values education include improvements in the wellbeing of ALL participants, enriched, higher quality teaching, better teacher/pupil relationships, raised aspirations, expectations and personal standards, greater academic attainment, more effective collaboration and sharing of best practices among teachers, enhancements to community cohesion, with excited enthusiasm and involvement from all key adults in the learners' lives.

Implementing the 5-star education system

By way of example, start with the school's vision, which could be along the lines of being a happy, child-focused, family-orientated place of excellence, in which everyone can recognise and achieve their maximum potential in all areas of their development. The school might therefore aspire to be:

- a place of learning, where everyone is successful;
- a place that fosters relationships, where everyone is respected;
- a place of acceptance, where everyone is valued; and
- a place of belonging, where everyone is welcomed and safe.

Now take a value from the above, such as respect. To begin consciously developing values fluency, the topic might be the focus of an assembly and then explored in more depth in classrooms. Here the approach can be tailored to suit the development stage and needs of the different groups of children. There is significant mileage to be gained from parents and carers also being informed of the value currently being studied.

The 5-star system provides progressive targets and therefore the learning becomes fun, purposeful and challenging. It is experiential and conducive to raising standards and ensuring pupils grasp the relevance of, in this example, respect, in real-life situations. Facilitators need to draw out pupils' ideas and suggestions so that initially they can begin to find ways of putting the particular value into practice within the safe, supportive classroom environment. Participants are then encouraged to consider how they might apply their learning within the school. Next they imagine and discuss how the value could be used to good effect in situations at home. As confidence in the topic builds up, the understanding gained and new skills acquired can ultimately be applied by individuals or as groups within wider communities.

An important aspect of values education as a discrete curriculum component is taking time to be quiet and reflective. Not only does this have a very beneficial, calming effect but it also enables participants to become ever more competent, because it helps them develop the habit of striving to find better ways of doing things.

As time passes, each child can realise his or her progress by reporting back and claiming points as a result of applying a certain value consecutively in real life.

- The first point - the *Green Level* - is claimed for attending the relevant learning session.
- A second point - the *Bronze Level* - is awarded for putting the value into practice within the classroom.
- The third point - the *Silver Level* - is gained when the value is applied somewhere within the school context.
- The fourth point - the *Gold Level* - is achieved when the value has been implemented in the home environment.
- The fifth point - the *Platinum Level* - is celebrated when the value is used in the wider community.

When values education is part of the core business of formal schooling, the dynamic, energising process builds children's confidence, self-esteem and self-worth, develops essential social and emotional skills and adds immeasurably to their attitude to learning. Staff, whatever their role within the school community, enjoy the cohesion that happens as teamwork naturally develops, and parents and carers cherish the deeper and enriched engagement in their children's progress.

5-star education system exercise

Try out this targeted approach to learning by, for example, starting with the school's core values. Take each in turn and over a period of time, encourage the children and young people to seek out opportunities of applying them in different situations so as to gain points. As the saying goes, "practise makes perfect". You could follow up on this initial exercise by focusing on other values such as those suggested by parents and carers or perhaps topical ones associated with, for instance, learning about World War I, or by way of a refresher, continue with the three central Olympic values of Excellence, Respect and Friendship.