

VALUES-THEMED ARTICLE: April 2014

How exploring values without preconceptions motivates children and builds learning capacity



... oh yes I can!

No matter what stage we have reached in our lives, no matter what age we are, it is never too late to have dreams and realise them. When children and young people are given the opportunity to systematically explore values, as an integral part of their education, they get fired up because the process makes so many aspects of learning meaningful and relevant, expanding individuals' horizons while also developing and strengthening their inner qualities. The effects can be surprising!

Values education provides different, lively lessons

Our mindset is key to unlocking our potential. The study of values is an engaging, holistic process that not only builds and strengthens participants' mental capabilities but their physical and spiritual attributes as well. It appeals because the exploratory process and the activities to reinforce learning are expansive and experiential. Children and young people enjoy feeling empowered as they gradually develop essential emotional and social skills that enable them to better manage and control situations. This is particularly rewarding when, rather than being swamped by negative influences, such as fear and perceived limitations, they can draw upon diligently mastered tools that help them realise their hopes and aspirations.



Participants also benefit from the collective experience and the realisation that they are valuable assets to each other. Teachers frequently notice how their pupils become keener to work alongside them and reach out to and support their companions, to the benefit of everyone in the group.

Discussion is an important feature that expands awareness and provides a rich source of learning. Within a deliberately safe, supportive classroom environment, children and young people can pluck up the courage to think outside the box, voice their views and try out their ideas.

By looking into the ramifications of different values in a range of contexts and their positive and negative effects, historically, currently and for the future, learners make connections and become increasingly aware of the potential impacts from selected values. This insight gently stretches minds and helps individuals make well considered, informed choices, including those involving an element of risk.

By way of illustration, one day a very experienced values-based education teacher found that a well-built pupil on the brink of exclusion was being given a last chance to change his attitude and joining her class. The newcomer was shocked by the warm welcome he received from his unfamiliar classmates. Never before had he experienced such attentiveness. He gradually took on more responsibility for his learning and started contributing to school life, becoming a real asset. His organisational abilities and newly acquired inter-personal skills, along with his natural energy and willingness to help led directly to the school winning inter-school trophies for football, cricket, rounders and hockey.



Exciting contemporary education - 10 motivational keys

Both children and adults require emotional support and respond positively to encouragement, love and a belief in what they are capable of. The ten MOTIVATION letters below provide a framework for demonstrating how a sustained focus on values can inspire children and young people so that they acquire tools to navigate successfully through each day, all the while uncovering and utilising their personal gifts and talents. This strategy also challenges teachers and others guiding, coaching and mentoring their charges because the process opens up participants' hearts, minds and spiritual capacities and sometimes, as described above, leads to surprisingly unexpected revelations, ideas and outcomes.

M *Meaning* The exploration of values is a highly engaging activity. It involves talking about them, putting them into practice and choosing ones that will enhance and enrich lives. By degrees this adds meaning to and deepens the mental, physical and spiritual aspects of individuals, their relationships, their sense of belonging and capacity to contribute to communities and a greater awareness of the complex world we all share.

O *Opportunities* The study of values expands and enhances learning opportunities. It develops essential social and emotional skills, is instrumental in dislodging and dissolving blockages and barriers to progress and raising aspirations. Participants gain confidence in their abilities and delight in taking greater responsibility for their learning and supporting the progress of those around them.

- T Trust** Children are eager to learn and improve but they need to feel safe and secure. They must be able to trust and feel confident about the support they can expect from those teaching, coaching and mentoring them, especially when they venture outside their comfort zones or require assistance to manage unproductive emotions or tackle issues and earlier conditioning that is not serving them well.
- I Individual** Children need to feel valued and learn to value all kinds of characteristics of others. Regular "Me time" for quiet reflection is important for wellbeing and self-belief as it helps to ease anxieties and insecurities and provides space in which individuals can draw on their own inner resources and creatively think about how best to go on improving and expanding.
- V Vision** Encouraging children and young people to develop exciting visions of their futures and successes helps to bring adventure into their learning. Nurturing their ability to take appropriate risks, overcome challenges and bounce back after knocks enables them to enjoy extensions to their repertoire of competencies and fulfil their true potential.
- A Attitude** Carefully chosen values can build, strengthen and if necessary, restore positive states of mind that contribute to learning capacity and better perspectives on life. Participants can begin to realise how paralysing negative emotions such as fear and doubt can be and how liberating and expansive enquiring, questioning, creative and inventive attitudes can be.

- T Thinking** The exploration of values, particularly those that are relevant to learners' concerns, excites interest and stimulates their thinking processes, especially as they seek out sustainable solutions. Understanding of themselves, others and the workings of communities grows. The process promotes problem solving skills and better reasoning capabilities that in turn lead to uplifting feelings of progress and satisfaction.
- I Imagination** Encourage children and young people to imagine what success feels like in achieving both small and large goals. Helping them to set reachable goals can work wonders in keeping them motivated. Invite them to use their imagination to figure out solutions to problems and envisage different outcomes depending upon the choices they might make.
- O Openness** It is essential that facilitators remain open to what their pupils may be capable of.

The study of different values raises participants' awareness of the consequences of choices. There are times when each of us does not meet our own or the expectations, behavioural standards and demands of others and it's important to be open about the effects and how this can feel, including being downhearted and frustrated. Open dialogue about values - some of which will clash - and their application in real life can be profoundly insightful and transformative, as is enabling learners to figure out which values to choose as anchors to ensure they can remain resilient, on target and go on achieving.

- N ***Nutrition*** Well structured, systematic values education offers an abundance of fertile opportunities for personal growth and development. It helps to raise aspirations. The process inspires and empowers children and young people so that they gain the confidence to take ever more responsibility for pursuing their personal development. Within informed and collaborative school and home environments it provides scope for individuals to surpass their own expectations and have the pleasure of supporting others as they strive to reach their goals.