

## **VbE works! The original research evidence...**

Values-based Education (VbE\*) is based on Neil Hawkes's comprehensive and rigorous research study (Hawkes, 2005), which provides the evidence that VbE has the power to lift the lid off pupils' potential and transform education.

### **Abstract**

Between 1995-2005 Neil Hawkes undertook the challenging task of conducting a comprehensive piece of qualitative research as a doctoral student at Oxford University. For six and a half of these years he was also the Headteacher of West Kidlington Primary and Nursery School in Oxfordshire. For the remainder of the research time he worked as a senior education adviser for the county of Oxfordshire.

Dr. Hawkes observed and critiqued the outstanding educational practices at West Kidlington School as the focus for the research. The research question was: *Does teaching about values improve the quality of education in primary schools?* The transformational properties of VbE had been introduced and methodically developed by the school and its community from 1993.

In summary, the main thesis of the research study was that if a school seriously develops the ethical aspects of the curriculum, through a programme of values education, then the school community will become both individually and collectively more reflective. That this reflective process will encourage the development of a shared understanding about the way people in the school should behave and learn together and thereby improve the quality of education. The research was followed up and its outcomes endorsed by a comprehensive Australian research project (Lovat et al, 2009). The impact of West Kidlington's programme of values education was also investigated by author and journalist Frances Farrer in *A Quiet Revolution* (Farrer, 2000). Neil Hawkes's thinking about VbE was informed by his research at Oxford when writing his book, *From My Heart, transforming lives through values* (Hawkes, 2013).

### **What the research found...**

The research was placed in the context of a detailed review of literature concerning values and character formation. It thoroughly analysed the thoughts and behaviour of sixteen teachers who taught values education. It looked at the effects of values education on pupils. It took account of the views of parents and governors of the school. A comparative case study school was also used to compare and contrast evidence about the effects that values education has on staff and pupils.

The research focused on the effects of learning about positive concepts (values) at a primary school. These values were considered by the case study school to be universal or core human values. They were described as universal, because they appear to transcend race, religion and culture as desirable qualities to be developed in people. Values are seen to act as positive principles for living, goals

to be achieved. The school expressed these values in the form of twenty-two value words, such as *respect*, *friendship* and *honesty*. The value words have both moral and spiritual dimensions: moral in the sense that the values help pupils to determine what appropriate or inappropriate behaviour is; spiritual in the sense that the values are considered in the context of the person's inner world of thoughts, feelings, personal identity, experiences and emotions. The research sought to establish whether, by educating children in values, schools enable children to understand themselves more clearly through an awareness of this inner world. Is it the case that, through this reflective process, each pupil gains greater autonomy, self-respect and self-esteem? The research study critically examined this notion through a rigorous analysis of data that was collected from the school, where the children had been educated through an explicit programme of values education.

### **The research found the following general outcomes of VbE:**

- underpinning the school curriculum with values education has positive effects on the life and work of the school;
- values education encourages pupils to explore and internalise values, thereby developing a range of positive personal qualities;
- values education has a positive effect on adults in the school community.

The research study reflected on whether it is possible for schools to construct a curriculum and supportive pedagogy that promotes the development of a well educated, reflective, more stable civil community. The research showed that, when a school seriously develops the moral/spiritual aspects of the curriculum - that is those that positively contribute to the inner world of thoughts, feelings and emotions of the pupil, the school community becomes more reflective and harmonious. It found that reflection, based on a deepening understanding of a set of positive values, encourages pupils to take greater personal responsibility for their learning and behaviour.

### **Implications of the research evidence for schools...**

#### **Schools should:**

- emphasise the importance and benefits of staff caring both for themselves and each other, recognising that positive values are best modelled by a workforce that feels valued;
- determine whether the Head, leadership team and staff can give values education their full support in order to develop consistency of staff behaviour and pedagogy across the whole school;
- consider how adults should model the behaviour that they expect of the pupils;
- consider the benefits to the individual and society of introducing and sustaining a moral vocabulary based on values that are seen as important dispositions to be nourished in pupils (e.g. respect, care and responsibility);
- consider the proportion of curriculum time allocated to reflective practices such as silent sitting;
- consider providing guiding principles for the development of the whole child,

recognising that the individual is comprised of physical, intellectual, emotional and spiritual dimensions;

- audit the curriculum to ensure that in practice it recognises every pupil as invaluable, capable and in need of positive encouragement;
- nurture an ethos that emphasises the positive, thereby creating positive results;
- create a behaviour policy, based on values, which maintains the integrity of positive adult pupil relationships by distinguishing between pupils as people and their behaviour. Such a policy enabling pupils to understand that their actions bring consequences.

### **The potential benefits for schools of VbE include:**

- helping to develop a positive school ethos that is more harmonious because of the direct correlation between values education and behaviour;
- creating a calm and purposeful environment in which everyone feels valued;
- enabling staff to feel valued in a culture of care and support;
- enabling pupils to understand themselves, through an awareness of their inner selves, so that they grow to be self-disciplined, having the ability to observe and determine their own positive behaviour;
- creating personal and school harmony by introducing an ethical vocabulary through the explicit and regular consideration of value words such as peace, cooperation, care and respect which is learned by hearing, reading, reflecting on, writing about, discussing and practising;
- fostering a school ethos that emphasises quality holistic education with an emphasis on high personal moral and academic standards;
- supporting the development of good quality relationship between all who work in the school.
- helping pupils to be in touch with their inner world of thoughts, feelings and emotions;
- encouraging pupils to develop their positive dispositions and to choose their attitudes;
- promoting self knowledge and thinking skills (of adults and pupils) through reflective silent sitting in assemblies and lesson time;
- encouraging the skill of active listening;
- developing emotional intelligence. By talking about their feelings, pupils learn to express themselves more clearly, to control their behaviour and empathise with others;
- having the positive support of parents and the community.

### ***Recommendations to schools...***

The research evidence, deduced from this study, led to one major recommendation and a series of subsidiary ones. The major recommendation was that there was a need for further research to ascertain the legitimacy of values education, and that this research should be undertaken by establishing a longitudinal study ranging across a number of schools that have adopted the methodology. Australia provides this evidence (see Lovat et al 2009). The more extensive research study should seek to establish the validity of a new educational paradigm that emerges from this case study, one that could be

termed *the philosophy of valuing*, its central tenet being that:

Values education is 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.

**From this definition of values education emerge a number of recommendations. These are that:**

- a. the concept of VbE is considered as being an agreed set of principles and practices that underpin all aspects of a school's life and work ;
- b. effective values education is centred on the understanding that without appropriate values words pupils cannot access ethical thought (what Dr.Hawkes later termed ethical intelligence). Therefore central to values education is the introduction of a common values vocabulary, which has been defined by a process of school-based identification of values (virtues, qualities). That these community-selected values are considered as a vital precursor for the creation of a values-based school community;
- c. the success of VbE in a school seems determined by the degree of empathy and support given to its consistent application by the headteacher. Values-based leadership is therefore an area for future enquiry and research;
- d. the key to effective VbE lies in an initial emphasis on the role and person of the teacher, rather than on the pupil, teaching materials or a programme. This is to emphasise an underlying conviction of the thesis that the teacher, in terms of his/her own identity and integrity, is the prime instrument for values education and that this is revealed through his or her own commitment to values and consequent expression and modeling of them;
- e. the most effective values teachers are those who are aware of the impact on pupils of their own thoughts, feelings, attitude and behaviour. Such an understanding underlines the need for teachers to develop a clearer and more accurate perception of their own attitudes and behaviour to enable them to model positive values;
- f. there is a need for teachers not just to be appropriately trained but also nurtured and cared for, including by themselves and each other;
- g. schools should be encouraged to be values-based learning communities and that classrooms should be values-based learning environments;
- h. the stress on the benefits of reflection as a meaning and purpose making process contributes to the development of understanding, critical thinking, self-awareness and consideration of self and others. That reflection creates the space

and time for pupils to realise that they have the freedom to choose, to choose above all their attitude and subsequent behaviour to events and people. In giving young children the facility for *silent sitting*, we give them the means to choose. No other part of the curriculum is concerned so specifically with the internal world of the child, and hence with developing this facility;

i. VbE does not just have a place in school life as part of its rules and regulations but at a deeper level within the identity, way of thinking and way of life of all involved in the school community. For instance, it can be seen as a way of helping pupils to identify meaning and purpose in their lives and thereby fill any existential vacuum, particularly if there is no meaning drawn because of an absence of religious or ethical teaching.

j. the holistic view of persons (teachers, pupils and others) as thinking, valuing wholes (human *beings*, not *doings*) within one human family and one world, requires an holistic approach to education and schooling, considering it as only being complete if it addresses the whole person;

k. positive relationships are essential for the creation and maintenance of a values-based climate for learning;

l. to question the whole notion as to whether values education can realistically be a movement for positive renewal of the educational system.

Behind these recommendations lies an understanding and assumption that VbE is far more than a process of instilling values in pupils. It is concerned with the very meaning and purpose of education; a statement about the quality of education that can be achieved and the impact that this can have on society. In this way of conceiving the role and purpose of education, the school has the potential for being a microcosm of what society could aspire to be.

### **Notes:**

- \* Dr. Hawkes first used the term VbE in 2006, as he considered that it was this more comprehensive term that accurately described the philosophy and practices in a school that is engaged in values education. Before that date the term Values Education (VE) was used. Therefore the term VbE will not be found in either Dr. Hawkes's research or Professor Lovat's in Australia.

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