

# Values education through thinking, feeling and doing

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## Abstract

*More and more sense a need for the purpose of education to be more than just knowledge acquisition. Values and morality are an integral part of our lives and should for this reason be carefully integrated into educational contexts. For values to become 'owned' by students, however, opportunities must be provided for them to actively and critically construct our so-called shared values. Imaginative teaching is a constructivist way of engaging learners emotionally in values-based education; and service learning, or a 'curriculum of giving', is a practical manifestation of sharing and caring, thus teaching students our core values through activity and doing – the most natural means of expression in children and adolescent learners.*

## The call for values

*"Being clever is not enough in our modern times; free will and deep feeling must accompany clear thought." Rudolf Steiner*

Not long ago I went to a graduation ceremony at a larger, well-known university in Australia. The vice-chancellor gave an address in which he continuously referred to the pursuit for and achievement of knowledge. He congratulated the graduates for their initiation into knowledge. He described the university as a place of fostering such knowledge. He explained the importance of knowledge to societal growth and betterment. In short, knowledge was 'king'.

It is not that I am surprised that knowledge was the key focus around which the vice-chancellor structured his speech. In many ways, his speech could be seen as a reflection of a deep-seated sentiment in mainstream education, which sees the acquisition of knowledge to be the definitive destination for learners. Early childhood professionals do cater for 'feelings' and 'doing' out of a developmental prerogative. But as children progress to formal schooling, we, as a society, still seem to have an end-result first and foremost in mind: knowledge. Our worldview, we might say, is one in which reason and rationality are considered the forefathers of our modern, Western civilisation – and rightly so, it might be added.

The only problem is that we have reached a point in human evolution where the discovery of a human wholeness and potential that go beyond the mere acquisition of knowledge seems evermore crucial – not only to our education system in general but also to our very survival as a species (Glazer 1999; Miller 1999; Suzuki 1997). We now live in a world that not only can create new ecosystems but also destroy our own in the blink of an eye (Merson 1999, p. 76). We now have all the technology (and knowledge) needed to make the natural environment serve our fundamental needs, and yet the United Nations estimates that on any single day, an average of 16,000 children lose their lives because they do not have enough to eat or lack access to clean drinking water, immunisation and medicines (Red Cross, personal communication).

We have gone through periods of polarisation in the last millennium, and in many ways benefited from them. In medieval times, for instance, when humans were particularly receptive to the world of feeling, a somewhat pagan notion of spirituality prevailed (Oldmeadow 1998; Warneke 1998). Yet, the capacity to reason was often not developed adequately to distinguish the spiritual from the superstitious (Steiner 1928). Through the era of modern science, humans have developed their ability to reason to near perfection, but have in the focus on rationality diminished connections with body, feelings and the power of intuition thus causing another imbalance (Sworder 2000; Schuon 1965; Northbourne 1963; Steiner 1928). The expansion of the scientific mind and consequent elevation of objective knowledge in the modern era no doubt have been valuable to us, counterbalancing illogical and rigid dogmas. But an impending task before us, it seems, might be to realise that the human condition, in order to be sustainable, individually and globally, requires more than just knowledge.

Intuitively and theoretically, at least, many are sensing this possible need for a moral and ethical base in education that transcends religious and political ideologies (Lovat 2005; Orr 1999; Dalai Lama 1999; Gatto 1997; Suzuki 1997; Palmer 1993; Neville 1989). Internationally and nationally, there are calls for more values education to counteract local and global problems of inequity, violence, egotism and self-destruction. More State departments are formulating core values to be taught in Australian schools and we are now also working on a National Framework for Values Education. ‘Resilience’, ‘social justice’, ‘respect’, ‘responsibility’ – these are but some of the shared values that are being articulated on charters these days, hoping that the teaching of such values will rectify our present problems.

Whichever many and noble ‘core’ values we agree upon, however, there are reasons to believe that we may, ultimately, only succeed if our values education is based on certain pedagogical principles. This article attempts to address a few of these principles, as well as show how these find a natural outlet in an action-based approach to values education, sometimes referred to as ‘service-learning’.

### **Some premises of values education**

Values are generally considered an integral part of our lives (Curriculum Corporation 1994). Whether we are conscious about them or not, whether we have purposely adopted certain values, or simply taken aboard what we were brought up with, values seem to be reflected in our actions constantly. In any classroom there are rules, expectations and specific things taught. Indeed, as soon as a teacher walks in the door, he or she embodies attitudes, ideas and patterns of actions characteristic of his or her persona. In other words, it is not a question of whether or not we should have values education – for this in many ways cannot be avoided. Rather, it might be more useful to ask how we can consciously make our awareness and practices of values as beneficial as possible to children’s development.

In America, where ‘character’ education has been promoted and implemented for longer than here in Australia, we see that educational programs emphasising values provide more than ‘feel-good’ anecdotes. A survey of 176 schools, adopting values education into their curriculum, showed that 77 percent reported a decrease in discipline problems, 68 percent verified higher attendance, and 64 percent reported a decrease in vandalism (Townsend 2004). After three years of initiating a values curriculum in the Jackie Robinson Middle School in New Haven, Connecticut, the

number of student pregnancies went from 16 to zero, and after the Merwin Elementary School in Irwindale, California, initiated a similar program, damage due to vandalism decreased from US \$25,000 to \$500 in a year; disciplinary action reduced by 80 percent; and academic scores went up (Townsend 2004).

These examples indicate that values education seems to be worth the effort. For this reason, the responsibility for teaching values should rest with schools as much as with parents. Mainstream education is a major institution for the socialisation of children into meaningful participation in society, and the internalisation of beneficial values is no doubt an integral part of such socialisation. And as the above research indicates, educational settings seem supported in such endeavours by incorporating policies and practices that make values education an integral part of the curriculum rather than something taught incidentally by individual educators.

But how do we practically teach real-life values? Maybe the inherent difficulty in answering this question is also why the specific teaching of values has not been as readily adopted as reading, writing and calculating: it ultimately requires admirable and skilful educators (Lovat 2005; Weissbourd 2003). Admirable because with no other learning objective is it more obvious that one must be able to ‘practice what one preaches’; and skilful because the teaching of internal values and attitudes necessarily requires attention to subtle and pedagogical modes of learning.

An essential first step in teaching values, therefore, might be to realise that the educator is, in him or herself, a most influential and potent part of any type of values education (Lovat 2005; Weissbourd 2003; Steiner 1974). As Weissbourd (2003) argues, no subject matter, no learning objective, can speak with such force and potential as human integrity, sensed so easily by children. Steiner (1974, p. 34) even argued that it is not so much what the teacher says that affects the child, as what he or she *is* in him or herself. This does not mean that educators have to be perfect human beings, Steiner went on, it only means that one must be able to exemplify on a daily basis the very values that one aims to teach one’s students.

What, then, *are* these values? The following core values are consistent with our democratic traditions of equality, freedom and rule of law, and have emerged from schools all over Australia (DEST 2005, p. 4):

- Care and compassion
- Doing your best
- Fair go
- Freedom
- Honesty and trustworthiness
- Integrity
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Understanding, tolerance and inclusion

Interestingly, lists of core values seem to be similar in many parts of the world. As mentioned, however, in order to be fully effective, core values rely on not only modelling but also a thorough understanding of how to teach them intentionally and pedagogically. A basic principle to this end is that of constructivism.

## Constructing values together

Whilst the following example of values education I experienced in an Australian primary school recently in essence is 'negative', I think it may contrast well, and thus illustrate, the argument to follow.

*It is nine o'clock on a Monday morning and the whole school is gathered in the gym for assembly. "Congratulation to students of the week," the principal announces in a scratchy microphone. The whole school claps, and the 'students of the week' receive their certificates one by one, followed by an awkward handshake from the principal. As the children return to their seats, the principal goes on: "These students have all made an effort and showed good manners!" While the whole school give the students another round of applause, I notice a huge poster on the wall with the very same phrases: 'make an effort' and 'show good manners'.*

*Later that morning, I am in one of the classrooms. "What do you need to do when you want to say something," the teacher asks. "Put up your hand," the children retort in unison. A bit later: "What do you do when someone gives you something?" The children, well conditioned, respond: "Say thank you!"*

To teach anything in schools, it is useful to consider how to complement a legitimate need for having clear instructions, expectations and reinforcement strategies, with the inherent need in learners to be able to construct their own knowledge (Kohn 1997). It is not that the above examples of values education are to be avoided at all costs. Only should there probably be a balance between such reinforcement strategies and opportunities to interrogate that which is reinforced.

Indeed, a commonly agreed upon definition of indoctrination is that (a) one is told what to do or think, (b) provided with no reasons, and (c) given no alternatives (Tan 2004). For something to qualify as indoctrination, it must have these three ingredients (Tan 2004). Hence, as long as we provide *reason* and explore *alternatives* alongside the teaching of our preferred core values, we may have explicit values education without indoctrination. If, on the other hand, we forget the two other clauses – providing reason and alternative – we actually indoctrinate, however noble our 'core' values and intentions. As indicated, the problem that I experienced in the aforementioned primary school was not that behaviour modification practices occurred but that they were the *only* practices I experienced over a longer period of time.

By the same token it might be useful to realise that behaviour modification techniques still can be underpinned by an understanding that the ultimate goal is not conformity but indeed the opposite: free and critical thinking. This, however, requires a holistic and socially critical approach to values education. If one looks at criminals in a prison, it is easy to say that they have not been taught values well enough by their parents and their teachers (Kohn 1997). That might well be so, but one could also address the problem from a larger perspective in order to understand the bigger picture. One could deal with systems theory – the notion that individuals' attitudes and actions are influenced not only by their immediate environments but also the systems that, covertly or overtly, determine the nature of these environments. We only have to look at the present world situation to understand the need for dealing with

problems on more than just their surface level. Whether we look at the problem of criminals in prisons or terrorism at large, it is noticeable that we must approach solutions that are not only directed to the individuals in question, but also the overall systems that either exacerbate or improve the problem.

In Australian schools, the attention to social constructivism is reflected in the regular talk among staff and with children/parents about the needs and values of the group, school and community and how the considerations of such needs relate to individual needs. Even though core values might be similar in many parts of the world, they still need to be reinvented, indeed *re-constructed*, by those systems and individuals that the values are supposed to serve. Then, and only then, will such settings be able to answer the frequently raised question in the values education debate – ‘whose values?’ – with the appropriate reply: ‘ours!’ (Townsend 2004).

Constructivism, however, does more than just avoid indoctrination and foster social coherence between systems and individuals. Constructivist teaching is really a reflection of the most fundamental principle in modern educational theory: that of learning from experience (Kohn 1997; Piaget 1971; Dewey 1938, 1938-1939). Research has shown unequivocally that learners must be given opportunities to explore and reconstruct the learning material with which they are presented, if not such material is to remain abstract and foreign to them (Kohn 1997).

Whilst many parents and educators may have known this intuitively for a long time, recent advancements in neuroscience have shown the interconnectedness of motoric, emotional and cognitive functions of the brain (Damasio 2003; LeDoux 1996). If, for example, a person hears the word ‘pen’, it has been demonstrated via brain scanning devices that the part of the brain controlling his or her right hand (if that person is right-handed) can be seen to be active before other parts of the brain. Via such scanning procedures, it has also been shown that the thinking processes of the cortex can be superseded by activity in the amygdala, the emotional centre of the brain – which, of course, raises some very interesting questions about what is consciousness, if you can ‘know’ about something before you can think about it!

Suffice to say the process of learning, whether it be letters of the alphabet or shared values, depends on a holistic engagement of activity, feeling and reflection – the tenets of constructivism. My point is not that this is not well understood these days with regard to learning in general. Rather, the point is that if we have largely accepted that acquiring knowledge best comes about when we engage students in experiential and critical inquiry, how is it that some of our values education still resembles the outdated teaching model of transmission? Values education may be high on the agenda at present, but it seems that – in our, no doubt, well-intentioned fervour – we can easily revert to old habits of one-sided behaviour modification and didactics.

To further highlight the importance of critical, experiential and emotional engagement in any type of values education, it is worthwhile to mention a closely related pedagogical principle to constructivism – that of engaging students’ affective domains via, especially, the imagination.

## Imagination as ‘feeling’ and ‘empathy’

Although still a relatively new and unexplored frontier in educational research, our imagination seems to be a link between our emotions and our thoughts (Egan 2005; IERG 2005; Sloan 1983). Brain research suggests that we have an ‘emotional brain’, which stores memories as wordless blue prints (LeDoux 1996). This wordless blueprint is a type of ‘map’, or ‘image’, operating via multiple association and simultaneous processes of both rationale and affective centres in the brain (Patten 2004). In other words, when we are engaged in imagery and imaginative activity, we might be involved automatically in a type of emotional engagement. Certainly, this would explain why children (and most adults) love stories so much; stories create pictures, or images, in our mind’s eye and we are lead into an ‘experiential’ mode of knowing. It would also explain sayings like ‘a picture tells more than a thousand words’; when looking at a picture, or an image, we have an opportunity to experience with more than our thinking faculty, we have an opportunity to experience, or ‘feel’, the object of our attention.

And feelings, as we know, are such a dominant part in our lives. Although such an elusive ‘part’ of the human body, emotions affect our glands, our lymphatic system, our blood and our nervous system, which in turn have a direct impact on retention and memory (Damasio 2003; LeDoux 1996). Think back to where you were when you heard the news of Lady Diana’s death, or perhaps the murder of John F. Kennedy. Why is it that we remember seemingly insignificant things connected to such experiences, such as the room we were in, the look on our friend’s face, the precise time of the clock on the wall, etc? Neuroscience suggests it is because the cognitive memories are an integral part of the strong feelings, imprinted into our ‘feeling’ brain (LeDoux 1996).

Now the significance to learning is that the principle of ‘cognitive amplification’ remains, even if the engagement of emotions is not as traumatic as hearing about someone’s death. The engagement of feeling makes us experience with more than just rational thought, and indeed brings new dimensions to such thought. Whether the engagement procures feelings of tragedy, jubilation, or simply a heightened sense of awareness, we seem to experience more deeply. This could explain why teaching that engages children emotionally and imaginatively *before* intellectually seems to have more lasting effects. The learning content simply becomes part of the child’s whole consciousness and being, rather than something superficially implanted into his or her organism as an artificial ‘fact’ or ‘truth’ (Steiner 1974).

But the imagination might be important for more than just engaging the emotions per se. Imagination might be crucial for developing *specific* emotions underpinning the development of altruistic values. Noddings (2004) argues that a prerequisite for feeling empathy indeed is the ability to imagine. Without the ability to project oneself into ‘the shoes of others’ or ‘how it would be like for someone else’, it is not possible to have true empathy. Noddings even goes as far as to say that such empathetic imagination should not be limited to victims and easy-to-like characters, but also extend to perpetrators and hard-to-like characters. True empathy is a global ability to understand the situation of others, not to sit in judgment. It is an imaginative exercise of ‘what would it have been like...’, and ‘how would I have responded...’. Via such imaginative activity, we form an *emotional* bond with those we try to understand – an

essential first step in making it possible to empathise with their situation (Noddings 2004).

The whole point of empathising with not only the positive and feel-good side of human nature is that children will then be able to deal constructively and emotionally with their own, whole psyche (Noddings 2004). To imagine the moral dilemmas of other people and their choices, good or bad, makes students aware of the corresponding human qualities, or lack thereof, within themselves. This ‘awareness’ is mostly sub-conscious in younger children and so it should remain. But without being exposed to the challenge of imagining other people’s sorrows and pains, even the self-inflicted ones, the foundation for developing true understanding, of self as well as others, may not be established.

There are, therefore, compelling indicators that imaginative teaching and learning may be beneficial to values education programs, not only because such a teaching cater for the ‘emotional brain’, the affective domains of learners, but also because it might be a vital step in fostering important core-values pertaining to empathy and care. However, because it is recommended that the educator does not force values, deep introspection or even empathy onto children, it is furthermore useful to consider a practical activity that naturally assists the formation of empathy *and* incorporates the so far discussed principles of constructivism. This activity is often referred to as service learning.

### **Service-learning and the ‘curriculum of giving’**

The American National Youth Leadership Council (2005, para. 1) defines service learning as follows:

*Picking up trash by a riverbank is **service**. Studying water samples under a microscope is **learning**. When students collect and analyze water samples and the local pollution control agency uses the findings to clean up a river... that is **service-learning**.*

Service learning is a term used to denote learning that engages students in action-based activities where they can apply their social and environmental knowledge in direct service to others or their community. As such, service learning combines principles of experiential and constructivist learning with a very practical manifestation of empathy in the form of giving to others or to worthwhile social change. There are few limits to what shape and form service learning may take, or to what outcomes may arise from its application. But the uniting qualifier is that of tying the curriculum to altruistic action – of giving of one self to something beyond oneself.

Interestingly, neither ‘giving’ nor ‘service’ is on the aforementioned list of Australian values. Yet such activity may be paramount to the development of our so-called core values. I introduced this article using Rudolf Steiner’s words: ‘being clever is not enough in our modern times; freed *will* and deep *feeling* must accompany clear thought.’ I have in this paper also focussed on how constructivism – the need to *actively* construct one’s own learning – is a key principle for learning in our schools, whether the learning is about fractions or values. In other words, most of what I have discussed so far point towards the argument, that whenever we as educators are able

to facilitate *doing* and *feeling* alongside thinking, that option is far superior to, say, thinking on its own.

But what is the ultimate ‘doing’ activity in relation to our core values of caring, tolerating, respecting, even empathising? Is it not a form of giving, of service? When we give, do we not exemplify these values, which like any other qualities seem doomed to remain abstract and theoretical if not lived in practical terms? Giving might be a practical manifestation of empathy, but just as importantly, it might also be the means by which children draw our otherwise abstract values into the *practical* and *feeling-related* dimensions that they belong to developmentally.

When you enter Barnumbi Steiner Kindergarten in Victoria, you will see children give on a daily basis. In the morning, children will set the table for morning tea and help staff prepare it. Afterwards, some children will be working in the garden, weeding and picking salad and vegetables for lunch. At lunchtime, others are again at the centre of washing, cutting and preparing the food. In the afternoon, you will see some children tidying up, folding blankets and doing other household tasks. You might see some children mow the lawn with small, appropriately sized push-lawnmowers. Outside, some might be milling the grain, which others will use for baking goods for afternoon tea. Though not noticeably distinct to the children, you will also see the multitude of ordinary play and games that is familiar in most other early childhood settings.

In giving, the product is not necessarily of primary importance. If children are to clean their tables at the end of every day, it should not be to avoid employing cleaners to come in and do a thorough clean later on. The aim, rather, is to build in patterns so it becomes second nature for children to serve their environment, their community, each other. There are many ways for children to give. What matters is not exactly what and how ‘efficient’ the giving is. The giving in itself may be the objective, as a practical way of building into children’s lives empathy, care, respect and most of our other core values.

Alethea Kalandros, a ninth-grade student in Baltimore County, Maryland, missed more than two months of the school year and was about to drop out; the next year she missed two days of school (Townsend 2004). What was different? She had enrolled in a program that allowed her to volunteer at a school for the blind – a part of Maryland’s pioneering effort in promoting community service, where all year nine students have to complete 75 hours of service or classes which incorporate service into a lesson. ‘It gave me a reason to come to school’, Alethea said (Townsend 2004).

Younger children are not able to articulate their need to give, yet this need is often more observable in them than in teenagers, who in fact often show a distinct dislike towards giving – most likely because they have been brought up in a society that frequently reflects attitudes of taking, consumption and competition. Indeed, giving to others is held in such low regard among teenagers that 60 percent of American high school students said in a survey that they simply would not be willing to serve their community for a year – which is a remarkable figure not only because of the unwillingness to serve but because most of those responding negatively have never served to begin with (Townsend 2004). As Alethea’s story indicates, however,

opportunities to give might be the key with which to unlock the very willingness to give.

Unlocking inner potential and self-actualisation via a curriculum of giving, or of service learning, might in turn also fill a void in children and adolescents that could counteract the tendency to try and fill this void superficially with risks such as alcohol, drugs, premature sexual relations. We might see less teenage suicides, less depression, less aggression. Indeed, we might see less unhappiness. We have in the Western world created a comfortable, materialistic society that affords all luxuries imaginable – but also a world that many young people do not seem terribly happy to live in. A curriculum of giving may not only make for more content youths in our society, it may create a momentum of positive, societal change that would grow exponentially in generations to come.

### **Looking to the future**

Remember the vice-chancellor's speech that focussed primarily on knowledge? As I noted in the introduction, such a focus seems inescapably linked to a thousand years of increasing authority bestowed on modern science as an encompassing worldview. The Montessori and Waldorf movements have had much success as holistic alternatives to traditional education, and many conventional settings have indeed adopted aspects of both approaches into their own. We have also seen the appearance of 'communicative capacities', 'cooperative learning', 'whole language', and 'multiple intelligence' approaches in various innovative public settings. Yet, as Miller (1997) points out, all of these developments are generally seen as improvements in instructional strategy rather than the advance of a counter-cultural paradigm. It has been, as Clark (in Miller 1997, p.208) puts it, 'as if a little new wine has been poured into the same old skins.'

An ultimate question, therefore, remains: what *is* the ingredient that may be lacking in our mainstream education system, and which is non-religious and non-dogmatic, yet has the capacity to embrace and retain the positive aspects of earlier models of scientific and religious schooling, liberal and vocational education, and so on? This question, in fact, is also the question many holistic educators ask themselves: how can we educate the whole human being – heart as well as mind – in a way that does not stir ideological and axiological opposition? It is to this question that we may have found a simple, yet potentially profound solution in service learning, or, as I have conceptualised in this paper, a curriculum of giving.

I do not wish to diminish the complexity and inherently subversive nature of values education and service-learning, and, certainly, much work is still needed to deal with the many questions arising from the current values education debate. But what may be stated in summation, at least, is that the drastic changes needed in our world will probably not happen before humanity realises that the most important goal of education might not be to acquire knowledge, but to develop the moral-aesthetic part of us, the 'feeling-for' dimension, the 'heart' – or whatever we prefer to call this mystical but no less tangible part of us. What does it mean to develop that part, the 'heart'? As I have tried to argue in this paper, I think that one develops the heart when one gives – such as observed in Barnumbi Steiner Kindergarten, or in the case of Alethea's story. Could it even be that giving, or serving, is the missing 'need' in educational theory these days? Various theories provide much insight into the

individual needs that must be met in order for the student to learn, to be content, to be happy. And yet we still experience anti-social behaviour in families and educational settings across the world. Perhaps this is partially because we, as a whole, do not allow for children to give, or to serve, on a regular basis.

My hope for education, therefore, is one in which from an early age children are allowed daily experiences where they can give and serve each other, their environment and their community. This could, I think, produce new generations who will understand from within about the 'economic efficiency of kindness' – that through giving, so much else is given (Kohn 1997; Steiner 1974). Perhaps this is also what the Dalai Lama means when he says that his religion is kindness. It may be a way of developing right human relations – whether one is a Buddhist, Christian, Muslim, etc. We cannot realistically think that we can ban all activities that are harmful and detrimental to children's development (supposing that we could all agree on what is harmful or detrimental). But through a curriculum of giving – through a values education of thinking, feeling and doing – we may equip children with an inner ballast that allow them to stand in the world more whole and thus make more informed decisions. It may be a non-dogmatic and non-judgmental way of developing morality from within.

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