

Carol Read



SPOTLIGHT ON VALUES EDUCATION

Values education for children:
issues, challenges and solutions
Carol Read

The UK's most famous refugee in children's literature is undoubtedly Paddington Bear. Paddington Bear was created by Michael Bond in 1956. When Paddington turned up in London from Peru, with only jars of marmalade to recommend him, he was taken in and looked after by the Brown family. Michael Bond often said that his story was inspired by his memory of child evacuees during the Second World War. However, these days, as we know only too well, the experience of refugees fleeing from conflict is often a far cry from the warm welcome given to Paddington Bear.

The way that individuals and societies act is an integral part of the values they hold and, from children's first contact with school, values are an important and integral part of their education. Arguably, values education is needed more than ever in the world we live in today.

What are values?

The term 'values' is complex and tricky to define. Definitions range from a focus on values as the 'disposition' to act in a certain way given the opportunity (Hill, 2004, p.25), to a focus on qualities and traits, such as honesty and courage, that make you a better person (Clutterbuck, 2007, p.5), to a description of values as a kind of 'ethical DNA' which determines your behaviour whether you are conscious of it or not (Hill, J, 2014, p.1). Other definitions recognise that values derive from the priorities that individuals and societies attach to different beliefs and to what they 'treasure' (Hill, 1994, p.236). For the purposes of this discussion, I would like to adopt a definition that has been used with children, as part of a whole school values education policy in the UK, and which children can easily understand: that values are the 'principles which guide our thinking and our behaviour' (Hawkes, 2009, p.108).

Values refer to three main spheres of our lives, notably the values we hold towards *Self*, such as honesty, reliability, perseverance, the values we hold towards *Others*, such as respect, tolerance, kindness, and the values we hold towards the *World*, such as protecting the environment, recycling, and social justice. There are also three overlapping and mutually influential dimensions to the values we hold. These include a *cognitive* dimension, as in rationally thinking about and

understanding the reasons and justification for the adoption of certain values, an *affective* dimension, as in an emotional willingness to act in a certain way and a genuinely-felt belief in the values we hold, and a *behavioural* dimension which refers to how we actually act and behave when opportunities arise to put our values into practice.

Although there is a difference between personal or private values (personal morality and life goals) and social or community values (responsible citizenship), our community values are reliant on our personal vision and beliefs and, therefore, underpin the kind of society we live in. In the context of school, values are embedded in all subjects, from maths to art, physical education and foreign languages, and therefore every area of the curriculum is implicated.

What is values education?

In the context of working with children, one definition is that:

“Values education is to do with developing children’s awareness and understanding of human, social, cultural, ethical and global values and how to behave as a responsible, fulfilled citizen within the community.” (Read, 2016)

The inclusion of values education as an integral part of the curriculum has been said to lie ‘at the heart of quality teaching’, ‘effective learning’ and ‘positive relationships’ (Noble & McGrath, 2010, p.58), as well as to be a ‘pedagogical imperative for student well-being’ (Lovat & Hawkes, 2013). In primary ELT, values education promotes inclusion, tolerance and respect among learners. It helps to develop children’s confidence in communicating in a foreign language. It also enhances social skills, intercultural competence, and critical and creative thinking.

Why is values education complex and controversial?

As well as being worthwhile, values education is complex and, in some ways, controversial, and presents a range of issues and challenges for us as educators:

- **Values are difficult to define:** values involve a complex mix of understanding, beliefs, behaviours, skills, competencies, sensitivities and cultural norms which are overlapping and interdependent but often difficult to unpack and describe.
- **Values need a context:** values may vary depending on time, place and context. For example, we may uphold the value of honesty, but it’s also not difficult to imagine a situation in which the better action may be to tell a ‘white lie’ – such as praising a host’s delicious food when it is actually mediocre.
- **Awareness doesn’t equal behaviour:** children may be aware of the desirability of a particular value, such as fairness, but this does not necessarily mean that this value will be transferred to their behaviour towards other children in the playground.

- **Values are difficult to assess:** we cannot rely on the outcomes of formal tests in terms of measuring values, and children would need to be observed over the long term, in a variety of formal and informal situations, to know if values education had succeeded.
- **Which values should we teach:** what rationale can we use for selecting the values we teach? What do these values mean, and how do we account for cultural differences? Is it possible to identify core values that might be universally acceptable to everyone?
- **Values should be a choice not an imposition:** children have an ethical right to choose the values that they hold and not be obliged to automatically adopt their teacher's values. Values education is not (or should not be) values imposition. However, if values education is more a matter of influence, this also opens up an ethical question about the legitimate nature and extent of a teacher's influence and control.
- **Values are learnt over time:** there is no quick fix to learning values. It is a drawn out, dynamic and continuous process over time. As children grow, they are also constantly developing and changing, and a particular value may not be in evidence until an appropriate opportunity to express it, or act in a certain way, arises.
- **Values education may be tokenistic:** it's important to be aware that values education is not a one-off, tick list of values to be taught and learnt. Values education needs to be deeply embedded in our approach to everything we do in the classroom, as well as offering multiple opportunities to children to think, reflect and act over time.
- **It is impossible to be values-neutral or value-free:** like it or not, we all implicitly convey values in our everyday classroom lives, for example, through our clothes, our body language, and the way we interact with children and respond to different situations. Given that it is impossible to be values-neutral or values-free, it may therefore be best to actively make the most of the values we project in aiming to provide a positive role model for children.

How children learn values

Although values may be complex and, in some ways, controversial to teach, children certainly pick up and acquire values that are likely to last for life during the pre-primary and primary years. Our role as educators in this is crucial through:

Socialisation:

the way that we approve, or not, the habits and behaviour of children, such as saying 'please' and 'thank you', or being willing to share, and taking the time to demonstrate and explain why these are important.

Modelling positive behaviour:

the way we provide a role model for children and consciously aim to embody the values we also want them to learn.

Giving opportunities to think and act:


the way we encourage children to question and reflect, think rationally, exercise personal choice, feel empathy, concern and care, express their views and act accordingly.

Teaching the language of values:

the way we introduce the vocabulary of values, whether in English or children's shared language, for example, teaching children the meaning of terms, such as 'respect' or 'fair', which help them to conceptualise values and to be aware of their own thoughts and actions, as well as those of others.

Integrating values into everyday classroom practice

In order to integrate values education into our own everyday classroom practice, we need to adopt a 'pedagogy of values' in which we regularly and systematically:

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- Encourage children to notice and be aware of values.
 - Help children to understand the reasons for values.
 - Encourage children to reflect on values.
 - Give opportunities to discuss values and express personal opinions, choices and preferences.
 - Encourage children to apply values to their personal lives & experience.
 - Look for ways to expand children's understanding and to think critically and creatively about values-related issues.
 - Give opportunities to act and put values into practice.
 - Acknowledge and, as appropriate, praise positive values-related behaviour.

Practical values activities

There are many procedures and activity types that we can use to help us do this. Six ideas from a tool kit of values activities include the following:

1. Picturebooks and stories: These often reflect important underlying issues such as loneliness, lack of self-esteem or exclusion. The focus on fictional characters and issues, which engage children's attention and may relate to their personal experience, allows them to maintain a safe distance from any problems that may beset their real lives. This enables children to reflect more securely and openly on significant issues and values since they are talking about fictional characters rather than about themselves.

2. Drama and roleplay: This may often arise directly from stories or picturebooks, for example, through the use of finger puppets to improvise and act out a dilemma, or propose

a solution to a conflict, in a story. Equally, they may come out of improvisations or prepared roleplays on specific values-based situations, such as cheating at homework or in an exam, stealing a bar of chocolate from a shop, or finding money in the street by chance and how you respond.

3. Discussion and personalisation: This often arises from picturebooks and stories and may also be given expression through drama and role play. As a regular procedure, discussion and personalisation allow children to reflect on how particular values apply to themselves and their world. An important element to keep in mind is that such discussions are best not done 'cold' or in isolation but rather when they arise from something meaningful, for example, talking about values of respect, inclusion and tolerance after children have read a story about differences, bullying and exclusion.

4. Philosophy for children (P4C): This is based on the premise that young children have a greater capacity for thinking than we generally recognise and aims to teach reasoning, critical thinking and argumentative skills. P4C was originally started by Matthew Lipman in the 1970s and subsequently developed by many others including Robert Fisher (e.g. 1996, 2001) and Gaut & Gaut (2012). P4C often involves telling children a story, or describing a situation with an ethical dilemma, and using socratic questioning to tease out opposing arguments and views. It is particularly useful for getting children to think about values issues and dilemmas that are relevant to them, for example, in what circumstances do children think it is right to tell an adult about something another child has done.

5. Games and activities with a values focus: These are wide-ranging and varied. They include, for example, a card game with characteristics, such as 'kind', 'reliable', 'helpful' in which children collect cards which apply to them and explain and justify their choices: I think I'm ... because They also include values clarification activities. For example, from a list of the UN Rights of the Child, children might be asked to identify and justify three rights that they think are most important, or from a list of characteristics, such as 'brave', 'caring' etc., children might be asked to sort them into whether the words are appropriate to describe men, or women or both, leading into a discussion developing children's awareness of language and gender stereotypes.

6. Songs, poems, rhymes and raps: Many authentic popular songs, as well as poems, rhymes and raps touch on values themes which relate to self, others or the environment. Many children's coursebooks include specially written examples of values-based songs, poems, rhymes and raps too. Although these help to raise awareness about values-based issues, such as friendship and inclusion, recycling and protecting endangered animals, they also need follow-up activities, discussion and application in order to ensure that these themes are not dealt with in a tokenistic way.

In conclusion, values education comes with many issues and challenges and is not an automatically accepted component of foreign language learning programmes for children. However, as I hope this article has shown, the inclusion of a specific values education strand in primary ELT not only has the potential to enrich the development of children's language and communication skills, but also to pave the way for children becoming confident and responsible global citizens in the future.

Carol Read has over 30 years' experience in ELT as a teacher, teacher trainer, academic manager, materials writer and educational consultant. Carol's main specialisation is in early years and primary language teaching. Her publications include award-winning titles such as *Bugs*, *500 Activities in the Primary Classroom*, and most recently *Tiger Time*, a six-level primary course with integrated digital resources. Carol is a former President of IATEFL. You can find out more about Carol by visiting www.carolread.com

Note: IATEFL members may also like to watch Carol's webinar with the same title as this article which is archived in the members' area of the IATEFL website.

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IATEFL Brighton Conference

YLTSIG Pre Conference Event, 9 April 2018

Children's rights, children's future:
practical applications in TEYLs

IATEFL YLTSIG is delighted to feature Carol Read as a speaker at our 2018 PCE!

Carol will be giving a 'TED' style talk on **Empowering children through the Sustainable Development Goals**

The United Nations' 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) provide a socially meaningful framework for teaching English to upper primary and lower secondary children. Through developing awareness and understanding of the SDGs, children become confident communicators and are challenged to think critically and creatively. They also develop social skills, attitudes and values that lay foundations for becoming responsible global citizens in future. This session explores a range of practical ideas, which use the SDGs as a springboard to integrate the development of language and thinking skills, social awareness and citizenship, and empower children to learn in a holistic and autonomous way.

The PCE will also feature plenaries, 7 other TED talks and a thought-provoking panel discussion with world-renown YL ELT specialists.

Carol will also open our SIG Showcase on Wednesday 11 April with her talk, **Little sponges? Child development and early foreign language learning**

Despite contrary evidence from research, teaching English to young children is happening anyway on an increasingly global scale. This talk explores the pros and cons of the early introduction of English and proposes how to optimize learning by contributing to the attainment of holistic child development goals that characterize pre-school. It also questions the assumptions underlying a narrow language-driven approach.

We look forward to seeing you in Brighton!

For booking and more information, visit <https://conference.iatefl.org/myconference.html>