

## Creating a culture of citizenship

**Values** are what we care about. They express the know why of life, knowledge and society, often at a fundamental level. While most education seems preoccupied by know how and know what, the know why is what endures when the how and what have ceased to be relevant. Values provide a reference point for thought and action. Having clear values is a powerful aid to decision making, because they provide a quick yardstick to assess different options. A strong sense of values is also empowering for both individuals and organisations, because they know where they stand in relation to competing choices.

Values vary widely between people, cultures and organisations, leading to very different consequences for what we do. The values of wealth, status, power over others, and fame have very different implications from frugality, equality, obedience and humility. People may be motivated by fashion or sense of justice, instant gratification or unconditional love, low prices or fair trade. In a market economy like ours, ultimate values are often reduced to self interest and economic success as measured by money, almost regardless of how it was obtained. Values such as the sacred, environmental sustainability or public service may be honoured but not acted on.

**Virtues** are those values which a society, school, profession or other group recognises as good. Although not a fashionable word, virtue stands for core values such as love, honesty beauty, truth and justice. Virtues also vary according to time and custom, so that one group may value honour above all else, while another values achievement and yet another values loyalty, right or wrong. Obedience, honour, loyalty or other values may lead some people to commit what others regard as appalling crimes. Transgressions against certain virtues can be severely punished, by shame, failure or even criminal proceedings and imprisonment.

For society, a widely respected set of shared values can bring enormous benefits. They answer fundamental questions about meaning and purpose, which enables people to get on with the what and how. Shared values are more likely to be upheld and enforced by people themselves, reducing the need for external enforcement. Shared values also create a greater sense of social cohesion. Investing in a common core of shared values could therefore bring a greater common purpose, lower enforcement costs and greater social cohesion.

But upholding shared values is not easy at a time of rapid change, in a society with often conflicting values and people from many different traditions. The question is, what values do you impart? Although certain obvious values are clearly necessary to live within the law, those who do not share them can experience common values as oppressive. Many people have strong opinions about what values should be taught, but values change. What was once taboo becomes tolerated or even the norm, and former norms become unacceptable. In a democratic society, therefore, it is important that all members take part in affirming and shaping the values we live by.

A citizenship school, therefore, seeks to uphold a core of shared values and also to enable every individual to develop a clear sense of their own values.

**Vision** expresses our aims, direction or goal. While values express why we do something, a vision points to where we are going, the outcome we want to achieve. Vision and values are closely linked, but a statement of aims or vision is more specific.

Schools clearly have a central role in developing the values and visions of each generation. Religious schools obviously draw their values from a particular tradition, although even they are re-interpreted for the age. Secular schools often have a more instrumental and relativistic approach to values. Citizenship schools have a strong commitment to the democratic values of equality, mutual respect, participation and social justice.

A statement of aims, vision and values should be used actively throughout the schools to reinforce agreed values and empower members of the school community in their own lives. Traditional ways of sustaining shared values, such as motto or mission statement, songs, stories, murals, displays, assemblies, rituals and celebrations, can be made interesting and relevant to people's lives.

The best way of inspiring a spirit of shared school citizenship and morale is to give young people ownership of the class or school aims and values, through a activity like that below.

A similar process can be used to develop a statement of class or school aims and vision.

### **Developing shared aims and values**

Many schools have a statement of aims and values. The aim of this exercise is to give members of the school an opportunity to reflect on the values they experience in school and to express the values to which they aspire. A similar format can be used to develop shared aims.

The exercise can be used to introduce new pupils, parents and staff to the school's values at the start of the academic year, to review aims and values as part of the school development and planning process, or to create a statement of values for each class. Obviously this exercise needs to be adapted to the circumstances in which it is used and the age of participants.

Take a few minutes to discuss the nature of values, giving a few examples such as truth, honesty, respect, loyalty, courage, trust, justice, equality and environmental sustainability. If appropriate, present the current statement of aims and values, or the new national curriculum statement.

Ask each person to write down the values they experience at school. With young children, ask them to say how they feel they are treated by others in school (or what they see as the aims of the school — what's the point of coming to school?)

Then ask people to form groups of four or five to compare lists and draw up a joint list of the values, in the order of importance as they experience them. Then ask all groups to share their lists, to see what consensus exists across the school. Different groups are likely to have very different experiences, which usually creates conflict or tension that may be hidden.

If this is the case, it is very important to spend some time bringing the values of different sections of the school community into alignment, by ensuring that everyone knows and understands what its values are or by changing the values, or by a bit of both.

To find out what values people want, ask each person to write down a list of values that they want the school to live by.

A useful refinement at this point is to ask each group (or individual) to choose one to three values that are particularly important to them, and to give a brief presentation on them to the whole group, saying what they mean and why they are important, giving examples from life.

Then ask people to form groups of four or five to compare lists and draw up a joint list of the values, in the order of importance. This can be done by writing values on cards and putting them in order. Then get the whole group to draw up a joint list.

If the group is large, prioritisation can be done by dot voting: give each person three, five or seven coloured stickers to put onto the joint list of values, each one representing a vote. Ask them to put the stickers against those values they see as most important (people can put more than one sticker on values they rate highly).

Finally, ask the whole group to create a short sentence or paragraph to express the top three to seven values.

For a whole-school process, it may be necessary to use this result to guide any working group or consultation process on school values.

The core values identified should be posted where they can be clearly seen and referred to at any time. During the school year, children can be encouraged to express these values in poetry, pictures, songs or plays, as well as apply them in their daily lives.

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