

School and Children's Values Assessment.

Giving Children an opportunity to express and understand their values in a meaningful way.

Phil Clothier

Purpose and Aims

The purpose of the Classroom Values Education Program is to provide children with a framework for learning about values that will prepare them for their eventual integration into the local community and the organizations where they will work.

The classroom is ideal for this purpose because it is the first opportunity children have of being in community with a group of peers on a daily basis. The rest of their lives will be spent in communities and organizational settings of one form or another.

The classroom is a community of individuals that come together on a daily basis for a common purpose. The beliefs and behaviours that form the classroom culture are a reflection of the beliefs and behaviours of the whole school modified to by the beliefs and behaviours of the teacher and the children themselves.

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'Happiness is the extent to which we live in love, as opposed to living in fear' Phil Clothier

Prior to attending school, children usually have only been exposed to the beliefs and behaviours of their parents, siblings and close relatives. The classroom is the first place children encounter beliefs and behaviours of adults and children who are not part of their family. To survive the classroom experience they must learn what appropriate and acceptable behaviour for community life is.

The aims of The Classroom Values Education Program are:

- ◆ To give children a framework for understanding the relationship between values, beliefs and behaviours.
- ◆ To help children understand their own values, and how to express them.
- ◆ To help children understand other children's values and how to discuss them.
- ◆ To help children understand what is a classroom and school culture and how they can work together to change or modify it.
- ◆ To give children the skills they need to be social entrepreneurs.

The Classroom Values Education Program will have different modules for different age groups. This is a program that can grow and develop with students. The first stage of the program, for younger children, focuses on understanding values and learning simple conversational skills to talk about them. The classroom values assessment provides a basis for this conversation.

The assessment is internet based and takes about 10 minutes for each child. Once they have accessed the web site they answer 3 questions. 1) Which of the following values and behaviours best describe you? 2) Which of the following values and behaviours do you see around you in your class? 3) Which of the following values and behaviours best describe how you would like your class to be? Under each of these question is a list of values that can be either positive or limiting

Examples of positive values

- * acting responsibly
- * balancing school work with play
- * being happy
- * being true to yourself
- * playing fairly
- * Examples of Limiting Values
- * aggressive/violent behaviour
- * bullying
- * impressing others
- * cheating

Once the assessment is complete, we process the results and write a report to show what is most important to the children, the health of the school or classroom and what opportunities for transformation show up in the results.

In my experience, I find that children understand the concept and reality of what values are and how they work in life and community. In fact they 'get it' very fast and sometimes faster than managers in the board room. In working with primary school aged children as young as six and seven they can very quickly give examples about where they

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see values and can talk about their beliefs and behaviours that emanate from these values.

One example was when I asked a group of children about the value of environmental awareness. Hands shot up all over the classroom. One child said that this meant being kind to animals and looking after the countryside and towns. When asked about the behaviours that supported this value, another child said that they would not drop an empty crisp bag in a field because a cow might eat it and die.

The second stage, for mid-school children, focuses on the relationship between values, beliefs and behaviours and the seven levels of values (Richard Barrett's extension of Abraham Maslow's Model). Again the classroom values assessment provides a basis for this conversation.

Once again I have found that children understand this type of thinking as easily as adults. We have made changes to the values words to facilitate meaningful conversation with children. For example the Level 4 transformational value of 'tolerance' has been expressed as 'accepting people the way they are' on the children's values template to make the language more accessible. A few adults who have seen this new children's values template asked if they could use that one too!

Having a framework of values helps the children to understand how different values based priorities arise based on what is going on in their lives and that promotes flexibility in their thinking. There is often more than one right answer.

The third stage, for senior children, builds on the second stage by discussing the role of values in community and nation building and learning social engineering skills such as how to create vision and mission statements.

At this stage we facilitate a simple process of choosing new core values for the group or classroom. Children very quickly find out that the process of becoming conscious about values is not always a painless one. When you state what you want, the elements that you don't want then come into much sharper focus and it takes courage and patience to work this through.

I tried this with my family a year ago and we jointly decide on our new core values. The first of which is 'Teamwork and Cooperation'. My 9 year old son and I had two weeks of disruption and

severe disharmony while we worked through the shadows of this new family value. I also learnt how quick children are at finding inconsistencies between the values and the behaviours. My 11 year old daughter called me to account (and still does) regularly.

whole participates and interacts at local, national or societal level to make a difference. For classes, societal involvement would include the local community or specific groups of less privileged or handicapped children in other parts of the world.

Seven Levels of Classroom and School Consciousness

Schools and classes have seven basic needs that reflect the seven levels of personal and group consciousness. Schools and classes grow and develop to the extent that they are able to master and integrate into their functioning the values and behaviours associated with each level of consciousness.

Each level focuses on a different need. Levels 1 through 3 reflect the basic needs of any group of individuals – personal security and basic material needs (level 1), harmonious relationships (level 2), and self esteem (level 3). Level 4 addresses the specific needs of the group with regard to adaptation to the changing external environment and the democratization of the internal environment. The key word is transformation. Level 5 focuses on group cohesion through shared values. At level 6 the group becomes aware of community issues and the group as a whole participates and interacts with the community to make a difference. For classes, the community is the school. For schools the community is the local external community. At level 7 the group becomes aware of societal or global issues and the group as a

Brampton Manor School

In the School Culture Assessment we did for Brampton, the most common personal values were caring, achievement and honesty. The most common values thought to be currently in the school culture were achievement, challenge and learning, and the main ones that people would most like to see in their ideal culture were achievement, caring and respect. The most common potentially limiting values were anti-social behaviour, long hours and inconsistency which I am sure would not be unique to Brampton. Looking at the results, the staff chose to see if they could reframe the limiting value of anti-social behaviour and focus on the positive side which would be respect - a value many people wanted to see more of in the school culture. Respect became the theme for an appreciative inquiry on their second residential. Presenting the findings of the Values Assessment brought many people on board who might otherwise have been sceptical. No-one could deny the figures. It was a good example of how a Values Assessment, which makes a diagnosis, could be combined with Appreciative Inquiry which offers the means to make the change.

