

# Promoting students' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development through specific teaching and learning strategies across the curriculum

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## > Aim

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To identify teaching and learning strategies within the whole curriculum which promote the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils.

## > Dimensions of this Case Study

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The study focused on two groups of 25 pupils from years seven to ten. One group was the target group and the focus of specific teaching and learning strategies to promote the school's values. The other group was used as a control group.

## > Summary of Findings for this Case Study

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- Although there was a strong consensus amongst pupils in this school on the importance of the school's core values, there was often a gap between pupils' espoused values and those in practice.
- After two terms of teaching values explicitly as learning objectives pupils' moral and spiritual vocabulary and discussion skills had increased.
- Explicit values teaching:
  - encouraged pupil responsiveness to social issues and community service;
  - required teachers to set their lessons and their subjects in the context of greater understanding of how the world operates;
  - enabled pupils to use and apply values with more discrimination in relation to the curriculum;
  - added a spiritual dimension to lessons because it encouraged a reflective searching for deeper meaning to events and issues;
  - encouraged critical thinking because it stimulated pupils to make judgements that required abstraction, reflection and speculation.
- Setting spiritual, moral, social and cultural development in the context of the whole curriculum framework avoided the separation of spiritual and moral development from its real life context.
- These core values integrated well into the content of the subjects of the curriculum.

## Background

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Two years ago our school embarked on a process of clarification of its vision. Part of this involved a consultation with all pupils, teachers, parents and governors about those core ethical values that are important to the school community. The result was a set of values that have the authority of consensus within the school and reflect the Anglican tradition upon which the school is founded.

### The Identified Values

- *Valuing ourselves*
- *Valuing others*
- *Justice*
- *Truth*
- *Stewardship*
- *Trustworthiness*
- *Forgiveness*
- *Fulfilling our potential*
- *Faith in Christ*

We then realised that each of these values has spiritual, moral, social and cultural components to them. We also decided that these values appear implicitly in all of the subjects of the curriculum, as well as providing a vision for the ways in which we organise the school community and its relationships.

## The research question

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We wanted to know whether explicit teaching and learning strategies to promote the school's values in Science, Geography, French, Music and Religious Education would make a difference to pupils' learning and would lead to changes in the ways in which they used those values in their thinking about the subjects.

## What happened

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We used a research instrument called Repertory Grid Technique drawn from Personal Construct Theory, to measure the ways in which 50 pupils related the school's core values to either French, Music, Geography, Science or Religious Education. Twenty-five of those pupils (target pupils) were in classes which had enhanced and explicit teaching and

learning objectives relating to the school's core values. The other twenty-five were in classes which carried on as normal (control pupils).

At the end of two terms we used the research instrument again to find out whether there were more changes in the target group than the control group. We also interviewed some of the pupils before and after the experiment. The fifty pupils were taken from years seven, eight, nine and ten.

## Teaching and learning strategies

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These entailed teachers identifying where in their schemes of work and lesson plans it was appropriate to introduce values, and then writing them into lesson plans as SMART learning objectives. These values were either:

- present already in the content of learning - for example stewardship of resources and road planning in geography;
- present in the application of the content of learning - for example learning about the community in French;
- present in the method of teaching and learning - for example working in groups.

## Observations on the usefulness of the project for teachers in this case study

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This case study identified significant potential to deliver key aspects of citizenship and personal, social and health education through explicit values teaching within the curriculum.

Collaborative teamwork between teachers and academic researchers created a potent research agenda and stimulated teacher professional development.

## Community-based values

*The local community, with its own religious or philosophical traditions became an important focus for a whole school framework for spiritual, moral, social and cultural development and citizenship.*

By making use of the school's own vision and values, teachers were able confidently to promote both the content and process of spiritual and moral development within the curriculum. This approach put spiritual and moral development within a real life context, rather than leaving it as a vague 'add on' to the main task of schooling.

## Making connections

Pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development involved them in making connections between their own experiences; the stories and traditions of their own communities and the wider stories of the global world which we all share. When these connections were made in the context of learning in a particular subject of the curriculum pupils were engaged, interested and motivated as individuals not just as students.

## Discussion and dialogue

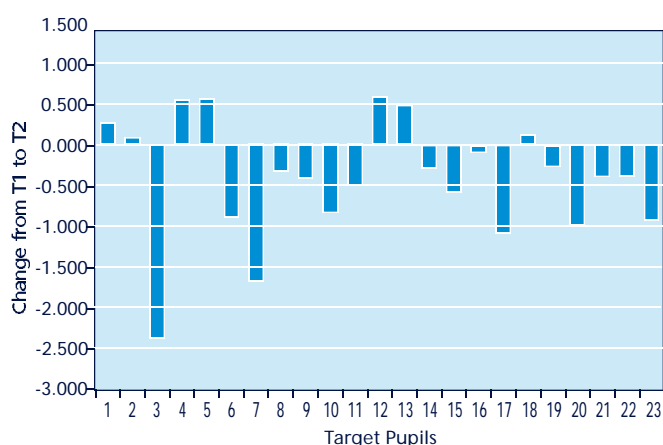
The project teachers found that promoting spiritual and moral development across the curriculum added a new dimension to teaching and learning, encouraged critical thinking, and stimulated pupils' imagination and interest.

Discussion and dialogue stimulated the spiritual and moral development of pupils. The quality of conversation in teaching and learning was critical in this area.

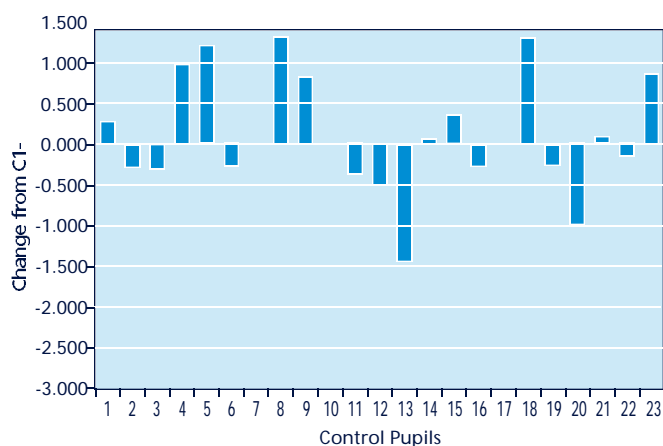
## Changes in pupils' thinking about the school's values

There were more changes in the ways in which pupils in the values enriched classes understood and thought about the core values in relation to the subjects than the pupils in the other classes. In particular the changes in the ways those pupils used the core values of 'valuing others and justice' were statistically significant. These charts show the amount and direction of change in the average score by pupil in the target and control groups for being fair / being unfair. Changes above 0 refer to changes towards being unfair, whereas changes below 0 refer to changes towards being fair. Pupils in the values enriched classes changed their use of the construct significantly more than the pupils in classes which carried on as normal and they did so in a positive way.

**Fairness: Target 1 and 2 Changes in mean between occasions**



**Fairness: Control 1 and 2 Changes in mean between occasions**



## French teacher's comments

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*'The most interesting and motivating part of this project was the pupils' response to the different approach, the ease with which values interventions could be incorporated within lessons and the discussions which ensued from these lessons.'*

Enriched work in French dealt with themes relating to real life situations, such as 'making a complaint in a shop' or 'food and drink'. When studying the theme of 'geographical surroundings' we focused on the creation of a new community and discussed buildings which would be needed, the occupations of people who would be setting up the community and the rules by which the community would live. Respecting and valuing others and justice were key values which emerged as important.

Pupils were more committed to this approach than other year 10 groups and the quality of work they produced indicated that they had thought about the values issues, and had views about the moral and spiritual aspects of being a community. Pupils' vocabulary skills needed developing to cope with this type of conversation, but this could be addressed in Key Stage Three.

## Music teacher's comments

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Using values in music was as much about the way we do things as the things we do! Take group work: it's obvious to everyone which groups are working well together - the ones that listen to one another and value each person's contribution, that work with others for the good of the group, that take care of each other and their equipment. In other words it's about having a sense of community, or as musicians say, 'ensemble'.

Listening to each other's performance means accepting that it's OK to be different - in fact it's good! Pupils are encouraged to value the uniqueness of every individual's response. By listening to music from outside Europe pupils hear an alternative way of doing things. Asking the question 'Why is it so different?' brings up the idea of music as an expression, not just of an individual, but of a whole society's way of thinking and feeling.

## Science teacher's comments

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*'During the course of the research I was surprised to find that my teaching schedule did not slip significantly behind when compared to another class being taught the same work but without values interventions.'*

Year 8 work in Science introduced all of the school's values, particularly truth, valuing others and ourselves and stewardship. When looking at the circulatory system the teacher introduced a new worksheet about Charles Drew, the blood bank pioneer. This extended pupils' experience well beyond that implied by the scheme of work, but set the work in a value-laden context, which required, and received an emotional response. The teacher also used material about the effects of smoking on the body which was already part of the scheme of work. To use this material as an opportunity for spiritual and moral development only required a change of emphasis so that pupils were actively engaged in thinking about how this related to valuing themselves, valuing others, and the environment.

In general pupils were willing to participate fully in the approaches to work which differed from what they were used to. Only occasionally did a pupil say something like "what has this got to do with science?"

## Geography teacher's comments

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*'Using the school's agreed values and emphasising these as a guide to our everyday behaviour and interpretation lent a validity beyond that usually found in learning the subject content for its own benefit.'*

This teacher's starting point was that no study of people interacting with places can be neutral in approach; we are all aware of the social, political and personal aspects of issues covered in Geography. It was not difficult to find opportunities within the year 7 topics to introduce the school's core values as explicit learning objectives for the 'values enriched' class. Topics on settlement, transport and finding the way using maps, intrinsically address issues of stewardship of resources, fairness, valuing others,

truth and so on. Using a variety of teaching strategies to promote discussion about spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues, was inherently beneficial to lessons. I used techniques which developed discussion and thinking along the lines that are hoped for, but are difficult to achieve, in many PSE lessons. Setting a framework for the delivery of the 'message' of the school's values gave weight to the targets of 'doing one's best', 'trusting and being trusted' within the context of a field visit and follow up presentation. Classroom debate simulating a local Public Inquiry for a new road brought out greater awareness of the respect owed to and expected from others, fairness and stewardship, when this was part of the target of the lesson.

*'Discussion about spiritual, moral, social and cultural issues promoted good listening and discussion skills, confidence and security in offering personal viewpoints. It encouraged a breadth of exploration of issues well beyond that usually found in these lessons.'*

## Religious education teacher's comments

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*'Approaching lessons differently helped develop good teaching and indeed exciting teaching. It encouraged a fresh approach to topics and helped develop strategies for pupils to gain a fuller, deeper understanding of values in everyday life.'*

Religious Studies is a subject that already has a focus on the development of pupils' moral and spiritual vocabulary and discussion skills. Therefore measuring the impact of teaching and learning about specific values was difficult, as one would expect pupils to grow overall in this area anyway. Different teaching and learning strategies were employed in a year 10 GCSE class in a module about Rites of Passage. Organising lessons with a focus on the school's values was extremely refreshing. I approached topics in different ways and used stories and imaginative scenarios to try to give pupils a broader understanding and taste of the world. A story about the torment early Christians endured and what it would have been like to be baptised in secret drew

on the theme of justice; discussion about how married/engaged individuals might respond in a range of situations, and why, drew on the themes of trust and truth.

## Further reading

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Publication number 125/7-00

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