

## **The Importance of Values Education**

**Roger Gordon Packham**, Western Sydney University, Associate Professor,  
[R.Packham@westernsydney.edu.au](mailto:R.Packham@westernsydney.edu.au)

**Margaret Taplin**, Institute of Sathya Sai Education, Australia, Education Consultant,  
[M.Taplin@hotmail.com](mailto:M.Taplin@hotmail.com)

### **Abstract**

Values education is needed more than ever before, due to the lack of harmony in society, with increasing mental health problems, people lacking direction and conflicts between groups and nations that are not respecting each other's ideologies. This is compounded further by the issues of the Anthropocene including rising climate change and, greater numbers of extreme climate events, brought about by our lack of care for the environment. In this paper we suggest that these problems have been brought about, to a large extent, by the lack of core human values that are fundamental to traditional cultures but have been forgotten in contemporary times. The paper presents an argument for the return to the education system of education in human values; this structure has the best access to changing the views and behaviours of the masses. We argue that all humans have good values inherent within them, and that it is society's responsibility to encourage core human values to be brought to the fore. However, we point out the limitations of isolated values education lessons that tend to focus only on the vocabulary and concepts of values and fall short of instilling an understanding that values have a key role in all aspects of daily life. We present a model, programme of Education in Human Values that aims to promote a 'constant integrated awareness' of values throughout the day, so that their practice of living the values becomes an integral part of daily life. The strategies underpinning this model – timeless strategies that were used traditionally to inculcate values - are described briefly, and interested readers are invited to contact the authors to find out more.

## Introduction

Values education is needed for the traditional reasons of educating people of character who will ensure a harmonious society, one that can deal in better ways with many of the current social issues and that helps to promote the wellbeing of all. It is also the contention of this paper that the issues of the Anthropocene, the current geological age, the period during which human activity has been the dominant influence on the Earth, are dramatic and require a values-based approach if they are to be improved. These issues include rising temperatures, rising sea levels due to melting ice, increased sea acidity, greater numbers of extreme climate events like floods, fires, hurricanes, typhoons, and tornados. There is also a danger of ‘tipping points’ being reached such that changes become irreversible and may drastically reduce the availability of food (e.g., see: Ellis. 2018; Steffen et.al., 2015a; Steffen et.al., 2015b). Such issues must be addressed urgently, which means that education, which is the front line for such change if the mass of the population is to be reached, holds a key role if human society as we know it, as well as all other life, are to be sustained rather than doomed.

This paper will consider first the issues that values education can improve, and then looks at what is needed in a values education program that can have the impact to bring about the changes that are needed. As an example of a values education program that attempts to address these needs, the approach called Sathya Sai Education in Human Values (hereafter referred to as EHV), named after its founder Sathya Sai Baba, a renowned Indian educator and philanthropist, is introduced and explained.

## Issues For Education Today

World change is a topic on the minds and in the hearts of many people at this time, particularly the issues of climate change and the COVID and other potential pandemics. World events appear to be spiralling into ever greater manifestations of negativity, and people who hope to change the world with more positive actions and intentions are frustrated by the apparent lack of effect of their good work. In recent times we have seen the rise of fundamentalism in many and varied forms, which seems in many ways to be a manifestation that is exactly the opposite of the more peaceful, spiritual world that many are seeking to create. There are issues of mental health, of young people lacking direction, of drug taking, domestic violence, inequality, poverty, racism, and racist attacks. It is the loss of values, such as respect for nature and for each other, and the increase in individualism, that are contributing to these adverse Anthropocene, social, and personal issues (Packham et.al., 2023a).

This all indicates that we are in a time of rapid change. To comprehend the process of world change, and its underlying reasons it is necessary first to understand the current times we live in. Never before have human beings been more interconnected. The acceleration of communications technology has created what is, for many, a global community where individuals are increasingly aware of the whole of humanity. The teaching that ‘we are all one family’ is rapidly manifesting itself, as the reality of our interdependence and interconnectedness reveals itself.

Yet, despite this, the extreme imbalances in our world are also being revealed, and it is no longer possible to shut out the reality of the large human family of which we are all a part. It is no longer possible to make someone else ‘*the other*’. Philosophies, ideologies, or religions that attempt to make another group of people ‘*the enemy*’ need to be questioned and challenged, now more than ever as the global community grows. Change is badly needed in a world where increasing numbers of people are lacking basic resources for survival, and a relatively small number have an overabundance of resources which are not being managed in the best interests of the planet.

We argue here that addressing this lack of values is not just a matter of cognition, that is of knowing what good values are. These problems point not just to a deficit of knowing what good values are, but to the lack of a moral compass to choose to put them into practice at all times. To address the kinds of issues described above, we need values that guide our physical and mental health, that promote peace and co-operation, and that foster care for the environment and for all ‘others’. What is needed is a values education that goes beyond the cognitive knowledge of what values are, and addresses a holistic education that includes cognitive, physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health.

## **Human Nature**

Rutger Bregman (2020) has described the idea that - what he believed to be a radical idea - “*most people deep down are pretty decent*”. Unfortunately, most people seem to think that everyone will only look after themselves when panic breaks out, and that humans by nature are selfish and governed by self-interest. This view drives the headlines that are read each morning and the laws that govern lives. Yet Bregman provides a realistic alternative to this pessimistic view, one that is based on overwhelming evidence demonstrating the opposite: neighbours help each other, and people are willing to give their lives even for perfect strangers. Bregman writes that while this truth has been shown over and over again by every branch of science, is corroborated by evolution, and confirmed by everyday life, it is still not accepted by rulers, is denied by many religions and ideologies, and ignored by the news media and most histories of the world. Bregman (2020) presents case after case of real-world examples, as well as scientific and psychological research, to support his argument.

If all the issues of social ills and the Anthropocene are to be improved, the place to start is with our own view of human nature. As humans are complex creatures with a good side and a not-so-good side, the question is which side do we turn to? This is beautifully illustrated by *The Two Wolves* (2023), a popular legend of unknown origin, possibly Cherokee Indian: It is a story of a grandfather using a metaphor of two wolves fighting within him to explain his inner conflicts to his grandson. When the grandson asks, “Which wolf wins?” the grandfather answers, “Whichever wolf I choose to feed is the one that wins”.

Even though there are too many examples nowadays of people behaving to the contrary, everyone does have fundamental good values inherent within them, so the challenge for values education is to tap into these inherent values, to feed the “good” wolf and hence to achieve what Bregman (2020) has described. This is the importance of values education.

## **The Role of Values Education**

If we believe that most people are decent and kind, everything changes, and a complete rethink can occur about how we organise our schools, prisons, businesses, and democracies, as well as how we live our own lives. This more realistic view of human nature will have major implications for how individuals interact with others and how young people are educated to this truer view of humankind in order to create a better world.

Humans need to think bigger than their individual lives to imagine the operations of an entire planet, together with its potential changes over very long-time scales. But at the same time, it is important for individuals to start with themselves, as they learn to appreciate that it is the totality of their own individual actions that cause, or overcome, the issues faced by humanity. But for this to come about, it is critical for individuals to realise that these issues are not for ‘others’ to deal with, and that every person’s actions do make a difference, even those who see themselves as “just one small person”. The challenge is to encourage a critical mass of people to examine their own behaviours and to want to make changes. If

we can achieve this, there is hope that humans can still shape a future in which both humans and non-human nature thrive together.

Clearly the education system has an important role to play in instigating and facilitating this change, especially considering that the best time to shape a person's character is in the early years. Educators therefore need to be equipped with ways to support the positive view of humankind, that humans have the inherent potential to be cooperative rather than competitive, that human kindness and altruism can change how we think and act, all as a foundation for achieving true change in our society: Changing the individual can lead to change in the family, change in the family can lead to change in the community, and change in the community can lead eventually to change in the world. This is why there is the need for consistent, systematic values education, with a key aim to stand up for human goodness despite opposition that this may bring out in others, to stand up for one's conscience even if it goes against the popular behaviour.

We suggest here that if this change is to succeed it needs to come from more than just isolated moral education or even values education lessons, but from a fully integrated approach by which the whole school culture is immersed in the positive values that are important to that culture. In this way, all stakeholders are practising these values and valuing them all the time.

### **What Kind of Values Education is Needed?**

There is a need for a values education that draws on the good work that is being done already and expands it, not as a separate speciality within education, but as a responsibility of all of society, enabling all educators to incorporate values into the whole school environment.

This was the aim of the Australian Federal Government project that ran in the early 2000's and demonstrated many benefits (Lovet et.al.,2011). So how might incorporating values education into schools be developed further today? All teachers are aware of the need to address all three learning domain areas - the affective as well as the cognitive and the psychomotor competences - to achieve a holistic education for their students. Holistic education is seen here as the development of the physical, cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of a person in an integrated way (Taplin, 2014).

Time and curriculum constraints, however, can impede teachers from introducing values and character education in their classrooms but, often more importantly, it can be hampered by a lack of understanding about exactly what and how to teach in the area of values education. Teachers may be overwhelmed with trying to understand the deeper meanings of the desired values, so often they give up, or only pay lip service at a surface level, rather than getting to the deeper understanding that is what brings about changes in students - and in the teachers themselves (Taplin and Li, 2021).

### **Implementing Values Education**

There are two key aspects involved in implementing values education (Packham et.al., 2023b):

- A language of values.
- A framework for acquiring values.

Just as every subject taught has a basic vocabulary, a language which expresses, defines, and captures the scope and uniqueness of that particular subject area, values education needs a vocabulary which allows people first to understand the concepts of the values that are important for their own wellbeing and that of their society. This is where the direct, specific values education lessons are important, to ensure that this language foundation is made. Then a framework is needed in which people are challenged to put these values into practice in all aspects of their daily lives and encouraged to reflect on their experiences, so that they come to recognise the positive difference 'living the values' makes to them and those around

them, and thus come to ‘value the values’ and eventually to practise them seamlessly without having to think about it.

### The EHV Model

A framework that enables this to be done effectively is the above-mentioned EHV programme. This program has been used widely around the world, both formally and informally. Formally it is practised to demonstrate the approach in model *Sathya Sai schools* in over 30 countries, including Australia, New Zealand, Kenya, Zambia, South Africa, Canada, India, Nepal, Thailand, and several South and Central American countries. It is also used in partnership schools that have adopted it as policy, including in China and Ireland. It has been adopted under a range of political, religious, cultural, and educational ideologies.

While EHV has many similarities with other values education programmes, it has many unique aspects not covered elsewhere. These include:

- Its focus on addressing teacher wellbeing by encouraging teachers to practise the strategies of EHV in their own lives.
- The program called *Ceiling on Desires* (Packham et.al., 2023c).
- The regular use of silent sitting (mindfulness).
- The emphasis on the unity of thoughts, words, and actions - or head, heart, and hands.

The EHV model is based on eliciting five core human values that are seen as universal and inter-dependent, that are already inherent in all of us, and that are traditional to most cultures: *Truth, Right Action, Peace, Love* and *Non-violence*. The framework allows for schools/teachers to identify the associated values that are important for their contexts and wider culture.

This also follows the view of Scheler (1971) that values form a hierarchy, and that lower values gain their power from higher values. Scheler’s lowest level begins with the senses, where something is pleasant or unpleasant, is useful or useless; at this level things only have a value if they please or have utility. The next level is values of life such as bravery, loyalty and humility, or their opposite such as cowardice, self-seeking, small-mindedness, treachery, and arrogance. Next come values of the intellect and spirit, and this is where the EHV human values of Love, Truth, Peace, Right Action, and Non-violence can be seen to fit alongside Sheler’s concepts of justice and beauty. The final level he saw as the holy, also called by others as sacredness, or the connection of all things.

The EHV framework promotes the total integration of human values across the whole-school environment so that it becomes a way of life and not just an add-on extra – in direct lessons that teach the vocabulary and concepts; in topics across the whole curriculum to reinforce the idea that values exist not just as separate entities but throughout every aspect of life; in extra-curricular activities; in school policies; and in the ways all members of the school community interact with each other.

A fundamental principle of EHV is that all teaching needs to be based on Love and that the teacher's example in ‘*living*’ the values is the most critical component. The goals of EHV are (Packham et.al., 2023d):

- To bring out human excellence at all levels: character, academic, and ‘*being*’, leading to self-awareness, self-confidence, self-motivation and being ‘fully’ conscious.
- The all-round development of the child (the heart as well as the head and the hands).
- To help children to know ‘who they are’.
- To help children to realise their full potential.

- To develop attitudes of selfless service.

The EHV framework proposes several teaching approaches. Five key ones will be outlined here.

1. **Quotations and positive affirmations:** Regular exposure to and reflection on the application of inspiring quotations or positive affirmations. This can help to establish positive thoughts in the student's subconscious thinking, that can be recalled and drawn on in times of need.
2. **Silent sitting:** can involve sitting and listening to one's breathing, to music, or simply to silence, or it can be in the form of guided visualisations. The currently popular practice of mindfulness is a form of silent sitting. This technique can have multiple effects on different levels of the mind, from facilitating relaxation in times of stress, to filling the subconscious mind with positive thoughts to be stored and drawn on when needed (similar to the use of quotations and affirmations), and to tap in to the deeper, mostly unused, depths of the mind in order to find solutions to problems or sources of creativity and intuition.
3. **Story telling:** Since time immemorial, elders have used storytelling to instruct, inspire and provide a basis for discussing right and wrong. In the EHV framework, the use of stories is encouraged in all aspects of the curriculum and outside the classroom - opportunities to tell stories and anecdotes related to the topics being taught, about famous people, heroes, and ordinary people who have demonstrated the kinds of values under consideration, stories with values messages embedded, and stories that give hope or encouragement, of intuition and inspiration.
4. **Music and Singing:** Singing, particularly as a group, is a highly effective way to teach values concepts and to offer solutions and inspiration to be drawn on when they are needed. In the EHV framework the use of music and songs is encouraged to promote positive feelings and celebrate aspects of the five key human values, as well as to understand more about their application to daily life.
5. **Groupwork:** In the EHV framework students are encouraged to work together in group activities, not only in the conventional sense of socially constructing knowledge – including knowledge about values – but to experience and reflect on the importance of 'strength in unity', that is interdependence, and recognises that the whole is more than the sum of the parts. As such, each individual has something unique and special to contribute to the group outcome, plus respect for others, and wanting to support the same benefits for others as one wants for oneself and opposes a 'win at all costs' mindset. All of these strategies lend themselves to integrating values messages while also enhancing topics across the curriculum, as well as dealing with disciplinary and other pastoral issues in and out of the classroom, thus empowering all teachers to be teachers of values (Packham et.al., 2023e).

## Conclusion

We have suggested here that values education needs a holistic and 'constant integrated awareness' approach if it is to transform educational outcomes, as well as student and teacher wellbeing, and this is what the EHV model offers. The aim of this paper was to motivate action; not just to think about teaching about values, but about teaching it in a more meaningful way. Based on the arguments presented in this paper, there is no question that values education is needed urgently, not just as lip service or an occasional lesson, but as a sincere, consistent commitment to bringing about the changes that are so badly needed in individuals so they, in turn, can contribute to bringing about the much needed change in the world. Fortunately, this is a growing field of research and practice (Lovet et al., 2023; Packham et.al., 2023f). The EHV model that has been described briefly here is a framework that offers simple, practical

methods that teachers and students alike can use in their own lives to bring about their own holistic wellbeing at physical, cognitive, social, emotional and spiritual levels. Incorporating values education into their lives, rather than just tacking it on as an ‘optional extra’ can lead to happy, healthier children, teachers, families, and communities, eventually resulting in a happier world.

### References

- Bregman, Rutger (2020) *Humankind: A Hopeful History*, Bloomsbury, publishing, London,UK.
- Ellis, E. C., (2018) *Anthropocene: A Very Short Introduction* (Very Short Introductions), Oxford University Press, Oxford
- Lovat, T., Clement, N., Dally, K., and Toomey, R. (2011) The impact of values education on school ambience and academic diligence, *International Journal of Educational Research*. 50, 3, pp. 166-170
- Lovat, T., Toomey, R., Clement, N., and Daly, K. (2023) *Second International Research Handbook on Values Education and Student Wellbeing*, Springer.
- Packham, R., Taplin, M., and Francis, K., (Eds.) (2024a) *Chapters 1 and 2*, In: How Values Education Can Improve Student and Teacher Wellbeing: A Simple Guide to the ‘Education in Human Values’ Approach , Routledge, UK.
- Packham, R., Taplin, M., , and Francis , k. , (Eds.) (2024b) *Ch. 4&8*, In: How Values Education Can Improve Student and Teacher Wellbeing: A Simple Guide to the ‘Education in Human Values’ Approach, Routledge, UK.
- Packham, R., Taplin, M., and Francis, k., (Eds.) (2024c) *Ch. 11*, In: How Values Education Can Improve Student and Teacher Wellbeing: A Simple Guide to the ‘Education in Human Values’ Approach, Routledge, UK.
- Packham, R., Taplin, M., and Francis, k., (Eds.) (2024d) *Introduction*, In: How Values Education Can Improve Student and Teacher Wellbeing: A Simple Guide to the ‘Education in Human Values’ Approach, Routledge, UK.
- Packham, R., Taplin, M., and Francis, k., (Eds.) (2024e) *Ch. 9*, In: How Values Education Can Improve Student and Teacher Wellbeing: A Simple Guide to the ‘Education in Human Values’ Approach, Routledge, UK.
- Packham, R, Taplin, M., and Francis, k., (Eds.) (2024f) *How Values Education Can Improve Student and Teacher Wellbeing: A Simple Guide to the ‘Education in Human Values’ Approach*, Routledge, UK.
- Scheler, M. (1971) *Formalism in ethics and nonformal ethics of values: A new attempt towards the foundations of an Ethical Personalism*. Trans. M.S. Frings and R.L. Funk, Northwestern University Press, Evanstone, IL.
- Steffen, W., Richardson, K., Rockström J., Cornell, S.E., Fetzer, I., Bennett. E. M., Biggs R., Carpenter, S. R., de Vries, W., de Wit, C.A., Folke, C., Gerten, D., Heink, J., M. Mace, G.M., Perss, L.M.,

Ramanathan, V., Reyers, B., Sverker, S., (2015a), Planetary boundaries: Guiding human development on a changing planet. *Science* 347, Issue 6223, 1259855.

Steffen, W., Broadgate, W., Deutsch, L., Gaffney, O. Ludwig, C., (2015b). The trajectory of the Anthropocene: The Great Acceleration, *The Anthropocene Review*. 2 (1): 81–98.

Taplin, M. (2014). A model for integrating spiritual education into secular curricula. *International Journal of Children's Spirituality*, 19, 1, pp.4 – 16.

Taplin, M. & Li, L. (2021). *Teachers' perceptions of silent sitting as a buffer to their problems*. Ch. 11, In: S. Parakharan (Ed.) *A Human Values Pathway for Teachers*. pp.125-150. Springer, Singapore.

The Two Wolves , (2023):

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two\\_Wolves#:~:text=The%20story%20of%20the%20Two%20Wolves%20is%20a%20metaphor%20of%20two%20wolves%20fighting%20within%20him](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Two_Wolves#:~:text=The%20story%20of%20the%20Two%20Wolves%20is%20a%20metaphor%20of%20two%20wolves%20fighting%20within%20him)

(downloaded 11-9-2023).