

English Summary

# Values Education

Theory and Practice



The complete book is only available in German:

## Werte lernen und leben

Theorie und Praxis der Wertebildung  
in Deutschland

*Bertelsmann Stiftung (Hrsg.)*

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## English Summary

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Values play an important part in our lives. As a representation of what is desirable, they provide orientation for our actions and influence our way of life. Shared fundamental values form the basis for cooperation and social cohesion. That's why values education is essential for both the individual and society. But how does this work in our society, distinguished as it is by a plurality of values? How can educational institutions these days help children become socially competent, self-reliant and responsible individuals? And what is the current state of practice in values education in Germany? The publication "Werte lernen und leben. Theorie und Praxis der Wertebildung in Deutschland" ("Learning and living values. Theory and practice of values education in Germany") provides answers to these questions. The key findings can be summarized as follows:

Values education is the process whereby individuals develop value systems and value skills in interaction with their environment. Science regards it as an essential aspect of personal development, and one which can be facilitated in numerous ways. The stages at which people are especially susceptible to values education are early childhood and youth. This makes specific, age-appropriate pedagogical concepts promising for these age groups. Contemporary concepts encourage development, focusing on self-directed value acquisition with the goal of shaping autonomous, responsible personalities and incorporating the day-to-day experience of children and youths. Key to values education are the various domains of socialization.

As the first authority in socialization, and the one with the greatest influence, the family bears particular significance here. It is the parents' values and their values education skills which exert the greatest influence on their children's value development. This influence is in turn dependent on the structures and roles in the family, socioeconomic and sociocultural factors as well as parenting styles and relationship models. For sustainable values education, a socially integrative, democratic or authoritative parenting style (e.g., emotional warmth, clear communication, delegation of responsibility) is particularly beneficial. In a globalized, pluralistic society, families are faced with new challenges when it comes to values education. Family education services can offer support here. Demand is high, therefore it is advisable that these services be expanded and publicized.

Beyond the family, pre-school is the first pedagogical authority in the life of the child. Embedded in a community of coevals, children have rudimentary experience with values and learn value-oriented behavior with and from each other. Here, values are primarily communicated through the different modes of interaction, particularly through respectful communication and through teachers in their function as role models. The latter can also encourage values education by explicitly discussing and reflecting on values with children. Given this context, it is the settings which reinforce teachers in their values education skills which are most important.

As the second pedagogical authority, the school plays a key role in values edu-

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cation, not least because it can educate children and youths over a long timespan. Values education is an integral element of the school's mandate to educate and nurture. However, the statutory provision and relevance of school values education is inhibited by a number of constraints which make implementation harder, including a lack of consensus about values, low levels of professionalism among teaching faculty and structural constraints. In principle, schools have numerous opportunities for promoting values education – indirectly (through the school culture) or directly, using specific methods (such as class councils and problem-solving exercises). Key conditions for the success of school values education include consensus about values, a respectful school culture and the value skills of the faculty. To reinforce values education in the school, it is advisable that it be more firmly anchored in the training and continuing education of teaching staff as well as curricula.

As an extracurricular learning and training field which is not only voluntary but also distinguished by participation and openness, youth work offers young people numerous opportunities for adopting values and value skills. The activation and participation of youths assumes a particular significance here, as does the commitment and the role of educators as “interested and interesting” adults. To reinforce values education in youth work it is advisable that it be included as a subject in the training and continuing education of teaching staff, that sponsors and institutions be sensitized and settings for values education in youth work developed.

Along with the family and educational institutions, peers exert a sustained influence on the values education of adolescents. However, making use of this influence in a pedagogic context is a challenge as there is no place for peers in the classic pedagogic model of younger generations being influenced by their elders. At the same time, peer projects and examples of practice show how this can be achieved: for example, through peer mediation, peer counseling (e.g., personal discussions about sexuality or drugs) or peer education (e.g., knowledge transfer in workshops). These planned, pedagogically driven processes fall under the category of peer involvement. This is characterized by exchange between peers, their prior training by adults, asymmetry of knowledge between peers as well as the absence of adults in concrete interaction. Peer involvement is often justified on the assumption that, when it comes to value issues and values education, it is easier to reach youths through their peers. However, research into the quality and effectiveness of peer concepts is only just beginning in Germany and lags a long way behind practice.

A look at other countries can provide valuable impetus for the values education debate in Germany. An international research project commissioned by the Bertelsmann Stiftung draws attention to a number of development trends which are also relevant to Germany. It shows that there is a trend toward programs with an integrative orientation, meaning programs which link various components with each other, for instance, values education which promotes social engagement. There is also a discernible link between skills development and prevention. Another direction is the link between the values debate and other relevant discourse such as the human rights debate as well as the integration of values

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education in school curricula. Valuable ideas are emerging out of the numerous concepts which utilize role models, so too the work of organizations which promote the necessary scientific evaluation and support for concepts and programs.

Some of the high-level recommendations for modern, pro-active values education include:

1. *Conducting pro-active debate on values and values education:* A democratic society relies on cohesion on the basis of shared (fundamental) values. This fundamental consensus must be constantly renewed and consolidated in the public sphere. An on-going, rational debate on values and values education is an important prerequisite here. This type of debate is particularly productive when it is conducted in line with conflicts and contradictions within society and in the day-to-day lives of (young) people.
2. *Supporting values education:* Values education requires support, particularly from (educational) lawmakers. The need for pro-active values education, as well as the goals, methods and resources to achieve it, must be articulated clearly and appropriate measures initiated and/or promoted. The mandate of pedagogical institutions in values education should be presented pro-actively. Value skills should be included in curricula on an equal footing with other basic skills and effectively promoted in educational and training institutions. It should be noted that values education forms the core of the educational mandate and is indispensable for personal development, representing the basis for the entire spectrum of preventive work.
3. *Clarifying the goals and methods of values education:* The starting point for any activity in values education is a shared understanding of goals and potential methods. Dealing with the diversity of values in our society requires both the recognition of a shared value base and respect for diverse value concepts. Building on this, it is important to communicate through methods which promote value competence and value acquisition – according to prosocial, democratic value systems.
4. *Anchoring values education as an obligatory component in the training and continuing education of professionals:* Good values education requires professional values educators. Values education is therefore an obligatory part of all pedagogic training. Key elements of a values education curriculum are the knowledge and skills related to formation of value systems and dealing with a diversity of values, concepts and good practice examples in values education as well as the function of pedagogic professionals as role models.
5. *Strengthening families as the primary value education authority:* Because the foundation of values education lies in the family, parents require appropriate skills to support their children's values education. This requires more extensive and refined services within the framework of family education.
6. *Recognizing and expanding the pre-school as an authority in values education:* Pre-schools, along with the family, exert a major influence on values education in early childhood. Therefore there should be greater focus on the professional development of values (education) skills in teachers. How pre-schools function in the area of values education and how they should be developed further is a challenge for researchers and pre-school development.

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7. *Making the school a central authority in values education:* Schools have diverse opportunities, insufficiently realized to date, to promote values education in children and youths. Values education should be a part of the school program and overall school development. In curricula and pedagogical work as a whole, greater attention should be paid to issues of values education and particularly the practical adoption of value systems and value skills. At the same time, the issue of “values education” is both a viable framework for existing pedagogical concepts, such as prevention of violence, as well as social, intercultural and democratic learning.
  8. *Utilizing the hidden potential of extracurricular youth work:* Good youth work is always good for values education as well. This is especially true if it is based on long-term, consistent relationship work. Tapping the potential of youth work involves improving the framework in which such work takes place and fostering professionalism among those working in the field. Actors and supporters should be further sensitized to the issue and called upon to develop settings for values education in youth work. Extracurricular services are indispensable for the values education of children and youths. The expansion of all-day schooling, in particular, brings with it new fields of cooperation in values education.
  9. *Recognizing and promoting the potential of peers in values education:* Incorporating peers in values education (peer involvement) opens up promising prospects. It is widely known that coevals have a better chance of reaching youths than adults. The existing peer concepts in values education should be recognized to a greater extent, and rapidly expanded. Moreover, these concepts should be scientifically supported and their results made public.
  10. *Increasing work with role models:* Values education always takes place in interaction with reference figures. Children and youths have role models by which they orient themselves. There should be greater use made of this value-orientation function and increased work with role models. Good practice examples should be more widely publicized.
  11. *Placing focus on value skills:* The basic goal of all activities around values education must be the ability to deal with the increasing diversity of values in our society. Here people require individual value skills. Further education services should therefore aim, to a greater degree, at the promotion of value skills and the abilities required for this – such as empathy, ability to adopt other perspectives, reflection and judgment, and the ability to handle both conflict and cooperation.
  12. *Utilizing developmental concepts:* Constructive concepts in values education are those which focus on self-directed value acquisition with the goal of an autonomous, responsible personality, which incorporate the day-to-day experiences of children and youths and are oriented toward both concrete, value-oriented action and reflection on this action. Concepts of this nature should be developed further.
  13. *Expanding concepts with an integrative orientation:* Values education is a complex process which incorporates cognitive, emotionalaffective, motivational and behavioral aspects. To better promote values education, more use should

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be made of concepts with an integrative orientation which link multiple promotion strategies to each other, such as experience-based, cognitive, social and emotional learning, skills development, reflection and action orientation.

14. *Disseminating existing knowledge on values education:* Science and practice have already supplied many important insights and examples in the promotion of values education. These insights and practical experience should be processed and disseminated. Concepts and practical projects on values education should form a focal point here.
15. *Orienting toward good practice examples:* The existing practice examples of values education represent a large reservoir of ideas and concepts in concrete values education work. Documentation of good practice examples can provide fresh impetus for the debate around values education.
16. *Encouraging the interaction of actors and institutions:* Pro-active values education requires the interaction of actors and institutions involved. Germany is relatively new to this. The interaction should therefore be more actively promoted.
17. *Intensifying research, development and quality assurance:* Values education requires continual research and (quality) development. The research and development requirement is considerable and encompasses research projects, formation of value systems, documentation of concepts and projects, scientific support and evaluation of concrete projects.
18. *Promoting international exchange:* For values education in Germany, greater exchange with other countries and regions is advisable. Taking a broader view will increase the chances of new prospects in research and development in Germany.



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