

Talking about feelings and values with children

Michael Schleifer with Cynthia Martiny
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This book upholds the notion that dialogue and discussion in the early years of a child's life needs to take place so as to build up an openness to explore topics as controversial as drugs, sex and safety. As parents are seen to play a key role in this process the author first asks parents and educators to examine their own thoughts, values and feelings on various issues and undertake philosophical enquiry to understand what underpins their value system.

The author goes on to say that as adults they should not deem their responses to this enquiry as the only position that holds value or truth, taking the stance of an absolutist, but to be open to the concept that their children may have differing values. He reminds the reader that a wealth of experiences, discussions and writings has been processed before their value system has been established and therefore this system cannot be grafted 'en bloc' to the child. Only universally held values should be imparted thus giving the child a starting point from which future situations can be considered and a stance taken. The concept that the child's opinion is of value (even at such an early age) and therefore should be given a voice and considered by educators and parents may challenge the previously held notion that children should be seen and not heard.

The book is divided into five clear sections guiding the reader through the questioning stage of what values are and how to discuss them, exploring the role of judgement, continuing with specific values (including honesty, politeness and responsibility) and feelings (caring, kindness, compassion etc), building up to tackling the more sensitive issues (separation, belief, touching) and concluding with exercise and questions to develop philosophical thinking and discussion. When using the exercises and discussion starters careful selection is needed as not all are appropriate for the under five age group. There are some issues over the list of suggested films to view with the 6-12 year old age range as the sexual content and inclusion of adult language could be considered inappropriate for this stage of development.

A plethora of academic texts have been used to research and support the writing of this book from educationalist, philosophers and experts on child development. This has enabled the writer to consider and explore the differing perspectives of moral education/philosophy for children and in so doing provide the reader with a comprehensive analysis. Although the illustration on the front cover is attractive it belies the content of the book. The childlike drawing may lead people to view the text as one that is easy to use and engage with, whereas it is clearly an academic text which stimulates and engages the reader with extensive philosophical enquiry. Contained within each chapter are suggestions of practical activities which the parent/educator can undertake with the child to explore various values or feelings however these are surrounded by academic content and therefore are not easily accessible to the lay reader.

To conclude this is an interesting and thought provoking book which encourages the reader to examine their own thoughts, beliefs and values. If the material was studied and then delivered in a series of workshops for educators and parents wishing to develop knowledge and understanding that would lead to encouraging the children in their care to discuss their values and feelings this would enable the material to be more accessible to a wider audience. Trainers involved in initial teacher training would benefit from reading this text if delivering courses in connection with Philosophy for children.

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