



## **Theoretical Background and Support for Living Values: An Educational Program**

### **Developing Values in Today's World**

The importance of helping children and youth explore and develop values seems to grow daily as reports of violence and inequities increase around the world. Yet, the challenge of helping children and youth acquire values is no longer as simple as it used to be when being a good role model and relating moral stories was sufficient. Violent movies and video games glorify violence. Youth often see “bad” adults awarded with wealth and fame. “Resistant” students turn away angrily from moralizing approaches to character education. Tides of apathy and resentment wash away the idealism and hopes of youth with each wave of more news about corruption, greed, excesses and injustice. “Good” students may adopt values-based behaviors when exposed to “awareness-level” activities, but many do not apply those values as adults within the larger society. **Living Values: An Educational Program (LVEP)** developed within this social context — and in response to this social content.

LVEP is an unusually comprehensive values education program that addresses the needs of children and youth today. Students need many different skills, at all levels, if they are to be able to love values; commit to them; and have the social skills, cognitive discernment and understanding to carry those values with them into their life. It is with this intention that the LVEP Theoretical Model and the Living Values Activities were constructed.

LVEP has been implemented at 6,000 sites in 70 countries, in a variety of cultures and settings. After a few months, dedicated educators find school cultures are infused with more communication, respect and caring. Often even children with very negative behaviors change dramatically. In an effort to understand why this approach works, some educators have asked to know more about LVEP's theoretical basis. This paper attempts to describe that.

### **Values-Based Atmosphere**

#### *Feeling Loved, Valued, Respected, Understood and Safe*

The establishment of a values-based atmosphere in the learning setting is essential for optimal exploration and development of values by children and young adults. A student-centered learning environment in which relationships are based on trust, caring and respect naturally enhance motivation, creativity, and affective and cognitive development.

Creating this “values-based atmosphere” is the first step in LVEP's “Developing Values Schematic.” During the training, educators are asked to discuss optimal teaching methods that

allow student's to feel loved, respected, valued, understood and safe. As they discuss methods that help students experience those feelings in an educational setting, trainers are simultaneously creating that environment during the LVEP Educator Workshop.

The LVEP Theoretical Model postulates that students move toward their potential in a nurturing, caring, creative learning environment. When motivation and control are attempted through fear, shame and punishment, students feel more inadequate, fearful, hurt, shamed and unsafe. Repeated interactions loaded with these emotions marginalize students, decreasing real interest in learning. Students with a series of negative school relationships are likely to "turn off"; some become depressed while others enter a cycle of blame, anger, revenge — and possible violence.

Why were these five feelings chosen for the LVEP Theoretical Model? Love is rarely spoken about in educational seminars. Yet, isn't it love and respect that we all want as human beings? Who doesn't want to be valued, understood and safe?

The primary author of the LVEP materials worked for many years as a school psychologist. With a counseling background, she enjoyed, early in her training, the teachings of Carl Rogers and Virginia Satir. Rogers' emphasis on unconditional love was a breathe of fresh air, a magic ingredient in a humanizing therapeutic process. Satir used an analogy of a metal pot for how individuals felt about themselves. Her clients began to use the analogy of feeling "low pot" when their self esteem was low, and she spoke about the pot of love being low in families with conflict (1972). Satir's perspective on the importance of family members' ability to enjoy each other and nurture each other is simple, but rings true. This continues to be reinforced by other leaders in the family therapy and parent guidance disciplines. For example, Robert Eimers and Robert Aitchison (1977) write on the importance of play in the parent-child relationship. They note research in which there was a 50% decrease in children's problem behaviors when their parents played with them three times a week for twenty minutes, for three weeks.

Many studies on resiliency have reinforced the importance of the quality of relationships between children and significant adults in their lives, often teachers. As the author began to do more counseling with children, she saw dramatic changes in students with simple techniques. Her personal viewpoint sharpened after studying meditation with the Brahma Kumaris. She realized that the quality of her love and regard for the children were critical factors in the growth process. A child's perception of the genuineness of her love and belief in his or her own goodness was in part dependent on the therapist's ability to feel such. As she began to be able to grow more love inside, it was as though children could use the energy of her love to heal and positively change. The therapeutic process still took time, but it had accelerated.

What happens to our learning process when we feel loved, valued and respected? What happens in our relationships with educators who create a supportive, safe environment in the classroom? Many people have had the experience as a child of an educator who they found positive, encouraging and motivating. In contrast, how do we feel when an educator, at school or home, is critical, punitive and stressed? While an interesting stimulus can heighten the creative process, high anxiety, criticism, pressure, and punitive methods slow down the learning process. Simply the thought that others may be critical or dislike you can distract one from a task. Dr. David Hawkins has found in his years of research that when people experience

the emotions of shame, guilt, apathy, grief, fear, desire and anger there is an insult to the immune system and a desynchronization of the cerebral hemispheres (2002).

Neurophysiologists are currently finding positive effects on brain development when a child is nurtured and deleterious effects when there are traumatic experiences.

Lumsden notes that a caring, nurturing school environment boosts students' motivation, that is, students' interest in participating in the learning process; their academic self-efficacy increases as well (Lumsden, 1994). A caring, nurturing school environment has also been found to reduce violent behavior and create positive attitudes toward learning (Riley, quoted in Cooper, 2000).

Currently in education, there is considerable pressure on teachers around the world to raise student achievement levels. Constant pressure and an emphasis on test scores often reduce "real" teaching as well as distract teachers from focusing on nurturing relationships with students. Much of the pleasure inherent in teaching well is lost. It is also harmful to levels of motivation and the classroom atmosphere. Alfie Kohn writes of "fatal flaws of the steamroller movement toward tougher standards that overemphasize achievement at the cost of learning. Basically, Kohn argues that most of what the pundits are arguing for just gets the whole idea of learning and motivation wrong, and that the harder people push to force others to learn, the more they limit that possibility (Janis, quoted in Senge, 2000)." Achievement automatically increases as real learning increases. Real learning and motivation come alive in values-based atmospheres where educators are free to be in tune with their own values, model their love of learning and nurture students and the development of cognitive skills along with values.

#### *Modeling the Values from the Inside*

In the LVEP Educator Workshops, the sessions on "Our Values, Values Development in Children" and "Rekindling the Dream", are designed for educators to reflect on the values in their own lives and to identify which values and behaviors make their life more rewarding. Far too often in this world, we rush from one event to the next, forgetting that joy is only possible in the moment — and that it most often springs from simple events and interactions of kindness. It is simple, and yet like mercury flowing through our fingers, it is difficult to always understand the beauty and importance of listening, allowing space, appreciation and being — for ourselves and our students. Honoring the dignity of each student allows the real reward of teaching.

The modeling of values by adults is powerful for students. They are often inspired by a teacher's example as well as teacher's passion for a subject. Student cynicism rises when educators tell them to do one thing while doing the opposite as adults.

#### *Skills for Creating a Values-Based Atmosphere*

The LVEP Theoretical Model and the session on Encouragement and Building Positive Behaviors draw from the teachings of contingency management as well as the above humanizing approach. It is well known that people respond positively to positive reinforcers. In this approach, human relationships are emphasized as well as sensitivity to the level of receptivity and needs of the students.

Skills for creating a values-based atmosphere also include acknowledgement and active listening, collaborative rule making, conflict resolution and values-based discipline. The method of acknowledgement advocated is that of active listening. Long a staple of counselors and therapists, active listening has been suggested as a tool for teachers by Thomas Gordon. Gordon's understanding of anger as a secondary emotion is a concept that is useful to educators in dealing with resistant students. William Glasser (1990) has also been an advocate of authentic and yet sensitive methods of honoring students in his work on Quality Schools.

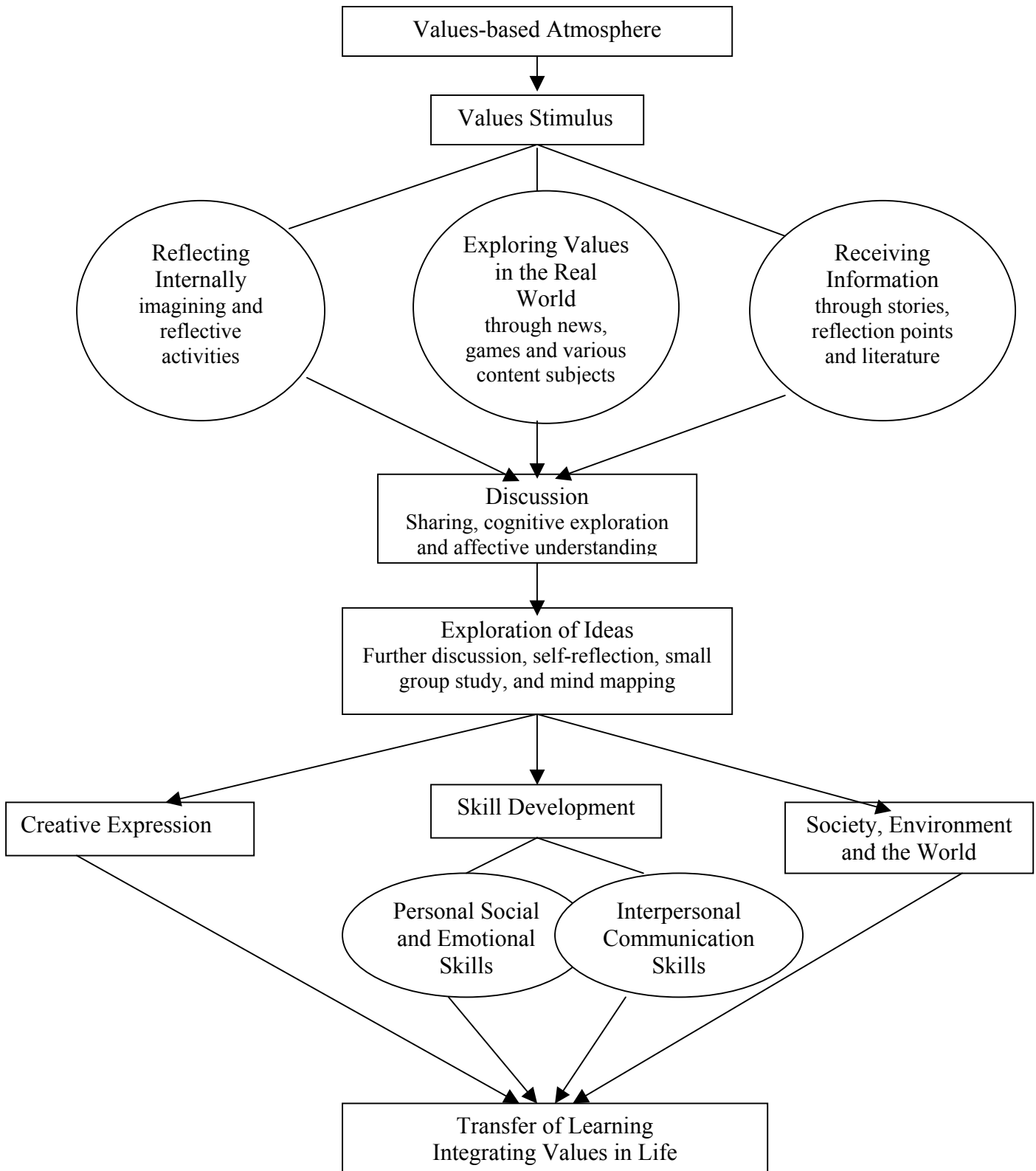
Collaborative rule making is a method to increase student participation and ownership in the rule-making process. Many educators have found that when students are involved in the process of creating, they are more observant, involved and willing to be more responsible in monitoring their own behavior and encouraging positive behaviors in their peers.

The LVEP training in values-based discipline, combines the theories of contingency management with a humanistic understanding of students and the belief in the importance of healthy relationships and well-being. Many people use the methods of contingency management as though the child is a machine. The need for love is not factored into the behavioral plan. The primary author had many experiences of creating behavior plans for students with severe or violent behavior problems. When times for play, and developing a relationship in which the student felt valued were added, the behavior plans were far more successful.

Other people use contingency management without understanding the importance of human emotions. For example, "time out" is technically a time away from an environment in which positive reinforcers are available. It is not considered a punishment. When it is used in a shaming or angry manner it becomes a punisher. Sarcasm, yelling or other forms of punishment fuel a downward spiral. Eimers and Aitchinson note that even twenty seconds of a parent being negative or yelling acts as a positive reinforcer. Hence, the negative behavior that the adult is angry about and trying to stop actually increases in frequency. This is seen frequently in some classrooms when teachers and students engage in the downward spiral of inadequacy, blame, resistance, resentment and revenge.

In the LVEP Theoretical Model, educators are encouraged to look at the positive and negative factors affecting one student, a classroom or a school and change the interactions so students experience being loved, valued, respected, understood and safe rather than shamed, inadequate, hurt, afraid and unsafe. This means that in a conflict resolution or disciplinary setting, the emphasis is on creating a positive plan. Students are responsible to help create the plan and educators do focus on treating the student in such a way that she or he feel motivated to be responsible. Yes, there are times when students are negative and logical consequences are needed — but during the time period in which that consequence is paid, the student is not treated as a "bad person". While the educator maybe be initially stern, opportunities are looked for to build relationship while the consequences are being carried out. This reflects back to Satir's work; people feeling full of love and well-being are more positive in their interactions and behaviors.

The following schematic of developing values outlines the LVEP Method, incorporating the values-based atmosphere and Living Values Activities.



## Values Stimulus

Each Living Values Activities lesson begins with a values stimulus. The three types of values stimuli noted in the schematic are Receiving Information, Reflecting Internally, and Exploring Values in the Real World.

A lesson on values can be launched in many learning settings. Often the subject matter leads into an interesting discussion about values. Or, a lesson on values can be launched when there is a conflict between students. These instances provide stimuli for the exploration of values. However, one must be cautious about doing values activities only at the awareness level. For this reason, LVEP advocates using the full range of activities found in LVEP's Living Values Activities books. Students are more likely to develop a love for values and be committed to implementing them if they explore values at all levels and develop the personal and social skills that allow them to experience the benefits of living those values.

Within most of the Living Values Activities (LVA) Units the three types of stimuli can be found.

**Receiving Information** — This is the most traditional way of teaching values. Literature, stories and cultural information provide rich sources for exploration about values. Care is taken in the LV activities to provide stories about the use of holding or developing a positive value. Stories about failures because of holding an anti-value are more prevalent. These are not sufficient; students feel more motivated by hearing positive examples of people succeeding with values.

Within each LVA unit there are reflection points. These provide information about the meaning of and application of values. Understanding core values is essential to teaching values if students are to develop lifelong adherence to high principles (Thomas Lickona, 1993). The reflection points are intended to be universal in nature, while holding an interdependent perspective of the importance of dignity and respect for each and every one. This perspective is important if we wish to create a better world for all.

**Reflecting Internally** — Imagining and reflective activities ask students to create their own ideas. For example, students are asked to imagine a peaceful world. Visualizing values in action makes them more relevant to students, as they find a place within where they can create that experience and think of ideas they know are their own. The process of creation and ownership is an essential step in feeling motivated about values. The visualization process is currently being used in corporations with great success. Use in schools and the classroom is growing. Peter Senge (2000) notes: "This collective discipline establishes a focus on mutual purpose. People with a common purpose can learn to nourish a sense of commitment in a group or organization by developing shared images of the future they seek to create and the principles and guiding practices by which they hope to get there. A school or community that hopes to live by learning needs a common shared vision process."

Reflective exercises ask students to think about their experiences in relation to the value. Students are also asked to reflect about different aspects at a later step within the lessons. It is

important for students to be able to work as reflective learners if they are going to be able to discern and apply values most appropriately to a particular situation.

**Exploring Values in the Real World** — Many Living Values Activities use games, real situations, news or subject matter content to launch the lesson. For example, one honesty unit begins with a story as the values stimulus. The next activity asks students to create a drama about honesty and a drama about corruption from previously studied history. Thus, the effects of dishonesty can be explored before the topic moves to the more sensitive area of personal honesty.

Each unit is designed from a psychological perspective, with the marginalized or resistant student in mind. The sequence of activities maximizes the path of least resistance — making the value relevant and beneficial to the student and his or her life. For example, lecturing to students about not fighting in school is an ineffective method to create peace and respect and can serve to further the apathy or resentment of already disenfranchised students. In contrast, beginning a lesson on peace with an imagination exercise elicits the natural creativity of all students. Once students develop a voice for peace they are more empowered to discuss the effects of peace — and violence.

## **Discussion**

Creating an open, respectful space for discussion is an important part of this process. Sharing is validating. Talking about feelings in relation to values questions can clarify viewpoints and develop empathy. Discussions in a supportive environment can be healing; children who are often quiet can experience that others hold the same viewpoint. They can release shame when they find others feel the same way. Children who think that everyone holds the same viewpoint can learn otherwise. Children who are accustomed to bullying can find out what other children think about the behavior. Students who may be considered dumb by others often can add a caring perspective or an insight that has great benefit for the group.

The discussion process is also a space within which negativity can be accepted and queried. When this is done with genuine respect, students can begin to drop the defences that necessitate their negativity. When the positive values under the negativity are understood and validated, the student feels valued and gradually experiences the freedom to act differently.

In many of the Living Values Activities, questions to discuss are provided. Some of these are to query about feelings; others are to open the cognitive exploration process and the generation of alternatives. Educators can use questions to delve into important emotional issues or alternative understandings. For values / character education to be effective, there must be “attention to the emotion side (self-respect, empathy, self-control, humility, etc.), what Lickona (1993) describes as the ‘bridge between judgement and action’ (Quoted by Shea, 2002).”

One reason why LVEP can be used in many different cultures is that the questions are open. Within the activities there are only one or two questions to which a “right” answer is given. The most important one is: “Is it okay to hurt others?” The right answer is “no”. If a “yes” answer is given, the educator is to explain why it is not okay to hurt others. The other questions are truly open, allowing the students to discuss the values and their application in

ways that are appropriate to their culture and way of life. For example, how respect is shown to parents varies in different cultures.

### **Exploration of Ideas**

Some discussions are followed by self-reflection or small group planning in preparation for art projects, journaling, or dramas. Other discussions lead into mind-mapping values and anti-values. This method is useful to view the effects of values and anti-values on the self, relationships and different sections of society. Contrasting the effects of values is an important step in seeing long-term consequences. Mind-mapping is also an introduction to systems thinking. Senge (2000) notes about systems thinking: “In this discipline, people learn to better understand interdependency and change and thereby are able to deal more effectively with the forces that shape the consequences of their actions.”

Discussions are often a lead-in to small group study regarding the effects of values in different subjects. For examples, in the “Problems of the World” activity for young adults, educators can assess the level of interest and passion about certain problems and facilitate the creation of small study groups. Values activities can often awaken real interests in students. To acknowledge their passion and to facilitate the exploration of the subject is the type of teaching that allows real learning and furthers intrinsic motivation. This is where a few questions from an educator can create enthusiasm: “Why do you think that happens?” “What is the relationship between . . . ?

### **Creative Expression**

The arts are a wonderful medium for students to express their ideas and feelings creatively — and make a value their own. Drawing, painting, making mobiles, games and murals combine with performance arts. Dance, movement and music allow expression and build a feeling of community. As students engage in the medium they often must refer back to the value and discern what they really want to say. The creative process can also bring new understandings and insights. As they create, the value can become more meaningful. A similar process occurs as students are asked to journal and write creative stories or poetry. The completion and beauty of the finished products can be a source of pride and act to enhance the self-esteem of students. A variety of creative arts can serve to let different students shine at different times. As Gardner notes, we are all different and have different abilities. A school climate that can allow each to shine at different times is a place where all can move toward their potential.

Music is also an important medium. Not only can it act to build a sense of community, but it can be a healing activity. Little children find singing and play especially healing; youth can use this medium in a powerful way.

### **Skill Development**

It is not enough to think about and discuss values, create artistic nor even to understand the effects of values. Skills are needed to be able to apply values throughout the day. The youngsters of today increasingly need to be able to experience the positive feelings of values, understand the effects of their behaviors and choices in relation to their own well-being, and be



able to develop socially conscious decision-making skills. Howard Gardener notes the importance of Intra-personal Intelligence and Inter-personal Intelligence within his theory of Multiple Intelligences (1983). Goleman, as noted by Rula Kahil (2002), found: “Emotional literacy programs provide students with strategies for self-control, focusing and psychological stability. These strategies reinforce the academic ability of students in any educational setting. Students who go through a prevention program that builds emotional and social competencies develop their emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). Such programs involve learning social skills, empathy, conflict resolution and guided imagery strategies.”

**Personal Social and Emotional Skills** — There are a variety of intrapersonal skills taught within the Living Values Activities.

#### *Relaxation/Focusing Exercises*

The Quietly Being Exercises for children three to seven years old and the Relaxation/Focusing exercises for older students and young adults help students enjoy “feeling” the value. The ability to “feel” peace, respect and love at will allows students to self-regulate their emotion and “de-stress”. This is an important skill in adapting and communicating successfully.

Therapists are noting the importance of self-regulation or self-modulation, especially for children who are traumatized (Chapman, 2001). These children, among other symptoms, often have difficulty concentrating and become frightened, frustrated and/or angry quickly. Some children are hyper-alert, always vigilant to danger. Some children have symptoms similar to those of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder; when danger is perceived the logical part of their brain, the cortex, can stop functioning and strong emotions emerge. The limbic system is then dominant (Friedman, 2000).

“Self-regulation” or “self-modulation” is the ability to calm the self down. This is very important in the recovery from trauma. It helps a person regain calmness more quickly when a danger signal is perceived and be able to stay more peaceful in daily life. As this happens the ability to concentrate grows again.

Kahil notes, “The impact of emotions on the human brain is scientifically recognized through the research done by Joseph LeDoux, a neuroscientist at the center of Neural Science at New York University. His research revealed how the architecture of the brain gives the Amygdale (the emotional sentinel) the privilege to hijack the thinking part of the brain (Neocortex). Le Doux found a small bundle of neurons connecting the Amygdale directly to the Thalamus (the information receptor of the brain). ‘This smaller and shorter pathway, something like a neural back alley, allows the Amygdale to receive direct input form the senses then start to respond before they are fully registered by the Neocortex’ (Goleman, 1995). Thus, there is always a possibility of times when emotions can overrule a person’s actions in a situation; times where self control is not dominant. Therefore, since emotions can over-rule logical and rational thinking there is a need for emotional learning and awareness.”

#### *Other Personal Skills*

Other LV activities build an understanding of the individual’s positive qualities; develop the belief that “I make a difference”; enable learning about personal rights and honouring their own perceptions; and increase positive self-talk, goal-setting and responsibility. Students apply

those skills in a variety of ways, for example, setting goals for the self and keeping a journal of discouraging and empowering thoughts.

**Interpersonal Communication Skills** — Emotional intelligence is enhanced by the above set of activities and furthered in activities that build understanding of the roles of hurt, fear and anger and their consequences in our relationships with others. Conflict resolution skills, positive communication, cooperation games and doing projects together are other activities that build interpersonal communication skills. Educators are encouraged to allow students to be conflict resolution managers. Situation cards allow students to apply values and look at consequences of different actions in difficult situations. They may also make up their own situation cards. Students continue to adapt their suggestions for good communication skills after games. One skill in the tolerance unit is to create assertively benevolent responses when others are making discriminatory remarks. Combining creativity with discussion and direct instruction techniques help students develop comfort in using the new skills, increasing the likelihood that they may use them.

### **Society, Environment and the World**

To help youth desire and be able to contribute to the larger society with respect, confidence and purpose, it is important for them to understand the practical implications of values in relationship to the community and the world. Many activities are designed to do exactly this while others build cognitive awareness of and motivation for social justice and responsibility. For example, students make up dramas showing the effects of holding a value or anti-value in business. They design a company in which the owners have the values of love. They map acts of intolerance and collect stories of tolerance in newspapers.

If the youth of today are going to carry these values not only into their personal lives as adults, but into the larger society, then it is also important to have them explore issues of social justice and have adult role models who exemplify those values.

For example, the simplicity unit takes up the topic of environmental awareness and ecological responsibility. Students are encouraged to find ecologically sensitive and helpful methods to stop further environmental degradation and promote the protection of the natural ecosystem in the local area.

### **Transfer of Learning — Integrating Values in Life**

“Integrating Values in Life” refers to students applying values-based behaviors in their life — with their family, society and the environment. For example, LV homework activities increase the likelihood of students carrying new values behaviors into their homes. Students are asked to create special projects that exemplify different values in their class, school and/or community. Parents and businesses can be involved as resources, for example, helping students learn organic gardening or how to clean up a stream. Students are encouraged to share their creative dramas and music with their peers and younger students. The ability to make a difference builds confidence and the commitment to values.

## **The Difference in Approaches for the Different Age Levels**

The approach in *Living Values Activities for Children Ages 3–7* (LVAC 3–7) is different than that in *Living Values Activities for Young Adults* (LVAYA). *Living Values Activities for Children Ages 8–14* is a mixture of both. The activities are developmentally appropriate and the needs of the students have been considered in designing the activities and their sequence.

Young children are like sponges as they learn so much from observing. They have a natural kindness to their character and bloom in a nurturing environment. They naturally take on the emotions and behaviors of the adults around them or react to protect themselves. Children of this age are especially receptive to cooperative ways of interacting. They enjoy learning about values and learn positive social communication skills easily. They enjoy expressing their thoughts and feelings and being acknowledged. Their vocabulary, ability to think constructively, and critical thinking skills develop along with social skills, emotional growth, and self-esteem.

Many of the LV activities for this age group create an atmosphere of peace, respect or love. Other activities gently teach social skills and bring forth the opportunity to understand and act in ways that are natural. Yet, understanding is built, choices are given and voices are empowered.

As children begin school and their level of social interaction increases, they are more likely to be influenced by negative role models, peers, and media messages. As puberty begins and students try to find and define who they are, these factors can be an even stronger influence. Some have more positive experiences at school and with their families than others. Over time, some students develop high levels of resistance. Many lose their idealism or become cynical. Hence, a greater variety of methods and skills are needed within the LV activities. The “box” must be opened before material is inserted; the relevance of values and a love for values must be awakened before social skills are taught. The LV Activities for young adults are carefully designed to maximize the chances that students will be inspired to understand, love, and commit to values, so that they will integrate them into their lives.

Below are the goals listed in *Living Values Activities for Young Adults*. The book contains hundreds of activities. Each activity is listed as a step toward achieving each one of the twenty goals.

### *Values and the Self — Personal Social and Emotional Skills Development*

- 1: To involve young adults in values activities; to create initial interest in and the feeling of relevance about the exploration of values.
- 2: To identify core universal values as their own through accessing their own creativity and ideas.
- 3: To think about and reflect on the meaning of each of the twelve values.
- 4: To enjoy experiencing a value and develop methods to de-stress, nurture themselves and experience a value when they choose.
- 5: To increase awareness of, enjoyment of and interest in values.

- 6: To increase peaceful, loving, honest, cooperative behaviors through identification and implementation of values-based actions.
- 7: To increase self-respect and the belief that “I make a difference”.
- 8: To increase making positive choices through detachment to negative behaviors and understanding emotional functioning.
- 9: To decrease susceptibility to inappropriate pressure from others through learning about personal rights, honoring their own perceptions, and thinking about their own message.
- 10: To increase positive self-talk, goal-setting behaviors and responsibility.
- 11: To creatively express and strengthen their ideas and feelings about values through artistic expression.

*Values and Others — Development of Interpersonal Communication Skills*

- 12: To increase awareness of and sensitivity to the effect of negative behaviors in order to decrease negative social behaviors and build alternative positive social behaviors.
- 13: To develop positive interpersonal social skills through understanding the importance of applying values and learning communication skills.
- 14: To build positive, peaceful methods of dealing with conflict, including conflict resolutions skills.
- 15: To increase tolerance and develop or increase appreciation of other cultures.

*Values, Society and the World — To Contribute to the Larger Society with Respect, Confidence and Purpose*

- 16: To think about the practical implications of values in relationship to the community and the world.
- 17: To develop an understanding of methods and reasons for promoting intolerance in order to increase the ability to perceive any discriminatory and deceptive messages.
- 18: To build awareness of the effects of corruption on society and develop cognitive awareness of and motivation for social justice and social responsibility.
- 19: To develop or increase environmental awareness and ecological responsibility.
- 20: To learn about values in relationship to institutions of the larger society and world.

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