

# Values, Worldview, and Faith

## *How Can Adventist Educators Pass Them On?*

**Values, worldview, and faith are the philosophical framework that undergirds all human activity.**

**By Julie Stefani**

**W**e talk a lot about *values*, *worldview*, and *faith*, and how to pass them on to the next generation, but what are these intangibles we seem so committed to transmitting? And how important are they, anyway?

Values, worldview, and faith are the philosophical framework that undergirds all human activity. Everyone, whether by choice or default, subscribes to certain values, a worldview, and a faith scheme. It is impossible to live a value-neutral existence. Therefore, counsels James Sire in his book, *The Universe Next Door*, we must think intelligently and consciously about values, faith, and worldviews and be active adherents, choosing to live the examined life.<sup>1</sup>

### **Definitions**

The terms *values*, *worldview*, and *faith*, embody complex, multi-faceted concepts. The word *value* can be either a verb or a noun, implying a process as well as a product.<sup>2</sup> As a verb, it describes the process by which we evaluate, clarify, affirm, respond, and make judgments and choices. It is a lifelong activity, an active, deliberate process that employs reason, experience, emotion, and the testimony of significant others to arrive at assessments or decisions. The process of valuing suggests prudent evaluation of options and a deliberate weighing of evidence.

When used as a noun, the word *value* refers to ideas and beliefs, standards of conduct, beauty, efficiency, or worth that we try to live up to or maintain.<sup>3</sup> Values are ideas so important that they guide human actions and choices.<sup>4</sup> They are the ideas we use to judge whether we like something; whether it is important to us; whether we are frightened of or feel good about an object, an event, a course of action, or a person.<sup>5</sup> Peter Hans Kolvenbach says values are like guides that “keep a train on track and help it move smoothly, quickly, and purposefully.”<sup>6</sup> “Values,” asserts C. Gleeson, “mean something precious in our lives for which we would be prepared to suffer, sacrifice, stand up, even die.”<sup>7</sup> Values are



powerful emotional commitments that derive from faith. They both grow out of and shape worldview.

Worldview can be defined as a set of presuppositions about our world. One's worldview provides bottom-line answers to life's basic questions—Who am I? Where did I come from? Where am I going? For Christians, the answers to these questions have their roots in faith; hence, faith is the precursor of worldview. Andre Godin describes faith as “a lasting persuasion or commitment.”<sup>8</sup> It embraces trust, choice, emotions, will, commitment, obedience, and behavior. “Faith generates values and provides incentive to adhere to those values.”<sup>9</sup>

Clearly, faith, values, and worldview are the pre-eminent driving force behind all human thought and endeavor. They comprise the furniture of our mental worlds and the scaffold of our daily lives. For Christians, they pervade all of life, even reaching into eternity. So, it is very important to pass them on from generation to generation. But how can teachers and schools know if they are being shared effectively? Are there any benchmarks, any guidelines educators can use to assess whether values education is successful? The following nine criteria may help. Successful values education:

1. *Provides opportunities for young people to think through the consequences of their actions.*<sup>10</sup> Dudley calls this fostering a

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“thinking climate.”<sup>11</sup> This means providing a variety of opportunities and environments for critical thinking to take place.<sup>12</sup> However, it has been found that simply using moral dilemmas and scenarios does not necessarily enhance moral development.<sup>13</sup>

2. *Employs stories and selected media.*<sup>14</sup> Research by Basourakos in Canada found that films followed by guided discussions were particularly valuable in guiding students to develop moral reasoning.<sup>15</sup>

3. *Helps students understand and explore the values and ideas behind various worldviews and lifestyles.*<sup>16</sup> It thus helps them see “the big picture,” including the “hidden agendas” and themes such as the Great Controversy.

4. *Empowers students to be “culture smart” and to recognize materialism, consumerism, and idolatry for what they are.* It also points them to the gospel alternative.<sup>17</sup>

5. *Interprets values jargon such as the notions of “choice,” and “privacy” or the slogans, “Just do it” and “Just say No!” and unpacks the agendas behind these concepts.*<sup>18</sup>

6. *Occurs when students experience positive emotions, and they feel rewarded, secure, and loved.* Students who are depressed, insecure, worried, or under stress find learning difficult.<sup>19</sup>

7. *Takes place when relationships with significant others are rich, genuine, and rewarding.* Learning is most effective when students feel supported by warm, grace-filled people.<sup>20</sup>

8. Occurs when values are modeled with integrity and consistency by significant others.<sup>21</sup>

9. Exposes students to experiences and service opportunities that allow them to practice and act out their values, faith, and worldview.<sup>22</sup>

In his book *Principle-Centered Leadership*, Stephen Covey presents a “Pyramid of Influence” model for prioritizing the above criteria.<sup>23</sup> According to Covey, the most important and effective means of positively influencing others is by modeling and example. This forms the foundation of the pyramid. The middle section comprises relationships. At the tip of the pyramid is the *teaching* or *telling* component, the least effective method of influencing. Applying this model to the above criteria, points six to nine are more crucial to successful values transmission than the first five criteria, which are more didactic.

### Instituting the Program

At the beginning of the 2001 school year, we as primary-level staff at Border Christian College (an Adventist school in Albury, Australia) saw a need to institute a values-education program. We observed that many children lacked a basic knowledge of values—their definition and vocabulary, and how to talk about and practice them in everyday settings. The students needed guided opportunities to “talk” and “walk” their faith in daily living.

Second, we observed that children could often discuss the ideas surrounding values, faith, and worldview, but their “head knowledge” did not always inform their behavior and attitudes. They needed help and support to recognize these inconsistencies and to bridge the “gap.” We felt that students needed a framework within which to form positive values so they could make conscious, responsible choices in a safe, supportive environment and receive appropriate feedback.

Third, we wanted to make a good school climate even better by establishing a formal, positive program on which to “hang” school discipline. We felt that a values program would empower children to diagnose their own relationship and behavioral challenges and to engage in self-monitoring. We hoped that the need for teacher intervention would be reduced as children practiced and internalized values, faith, and worldviews, and that student confidence and self-esteem would be enhanced.

At the primary level at Border Christian College, we chose to implement a values-education program by Karen

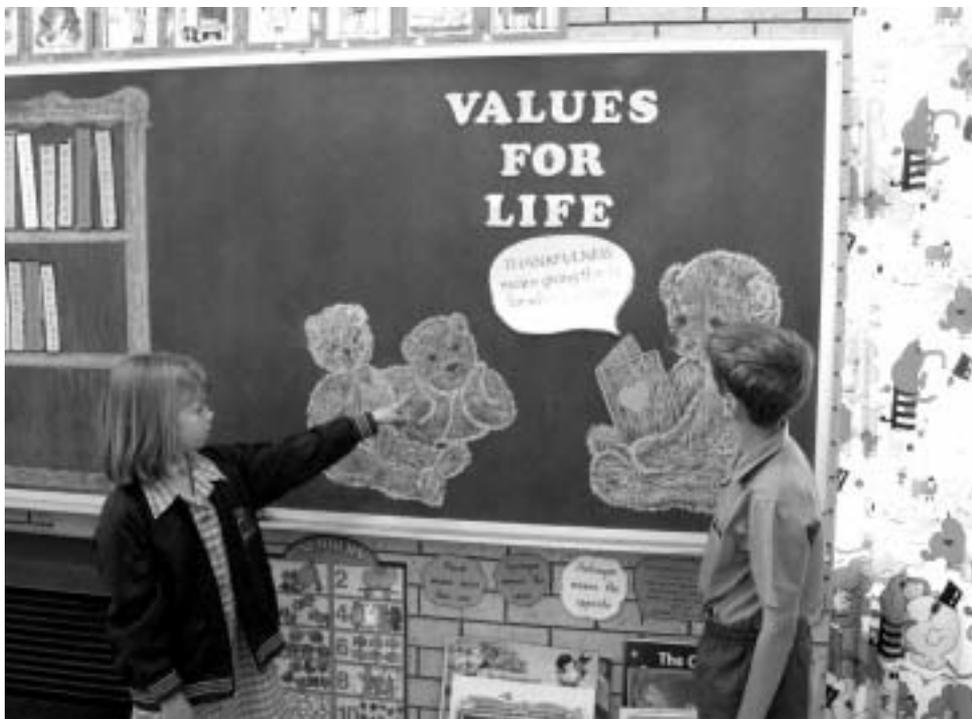
## Are there any benchmarks, any guidelines educators can use to assess whether values education is successful?

Brunskill entitled *The Healthy Relationships Program*.<sup>24</sup> Although the program did not overtly place values in Christian context, and Brunskill’s basic approach is somewhat humanistic, we felt that we could tailor the program to a Christian worldview and integrate it with our faith.

We chose to implement the program by drawing up a roster of values and having the entire primary school focus on one value each week—36 values over the course of a year. This was formally organized and included in all teachers’ weekly schedules.

### Focusing on the Value

To focus the children’s minds on each week’s value and keep parents and visitors abreast of the program, we hung a new display board in the school foyer and created a three-



part display to support the program. The lefthand side of the display focused on the current value, the center of the display highlighted Jesus’ masterful goal for values education: “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you,” and the righthand section of the display featured the children being honored for practicing the previous week’s value. Next to the display board, we pasted a sort of “hall of fame” of past values. This display tangibly defines the program, its direction, success, and current emphases.

In addition to the foyer display, each classroom features a display focusing on the value being taught. These serve as a reference point for discussions during the week and connect classroom teaching of values, faith, and worldview with prac-

tice through *The Healthy Relationships Program*.

We employ many different approaches to help students understand and internalize the various values. However, one area remains consistent. As a new value is introduced, we look at four main questions over the course of the week:

1. What is it?
2. Why practice it?
3. How do I practice it?
4. What are the signs of success?

These four questions form the basic structure of our values program.

Formal teaching of *The Healthy Relationships Program* has been incorporated into the Bible program at Border Christian College. The content varies and is covered in different ways. Monday morning worship is devoted to a discussion of the week's value—after the value is explained, we discuss why and how it should be practiced. In the Years 1 and 2 classroom, I employ stories and selected media—e.g., one of *Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories*, a video story from *Anthony Paul's Character Building Storybook*, or a selection from Richard Duerksen's *God's Heroes* cassette series.<sup>25</sup> Throughout the week, I use morning worship times to engage students in role-playing to practice the week's value. I also use some of the excellent activity sheets from the accompanying blackline master book by Karen Brunskill. Through discussion, the students learn to think about “the big picture” surrounding the value upon which we are focusing.

It is in the informal, spontaneous situations, the “teachable moments,” that real values in education often takes place, and herein lies the real strength of this program. This program labels values, not children. As we describe each value to children, we show them that we believe they are capable of practicing it.

### Practicing the Values

Practicing the values is the focus of *The Healthy Relationships Program* at Border Christian College. To keep this central to our program, we deliberately and consistently translate each value into everyday situations—How does *excellence* impact on work presentation? How does *orderliness* inform desk tidiness? How does *compassion* deal with a forgotten lunch? How does *fairness* control calling out answers? How does *courtesy* suggest how to line up? How does *flexibility* affect our attitude toward waiting for a late bus? We have found that school life naturally presents many opportunities—“teachable moments”—throughout the day when we can engage students in reality-based thinking about the current value (as well as all the past ones) and help them to make choices that practice the value. Students are thus constantly exposed to opportunities to act out faith, worldview, and values in a secure, caring environment.

We have found that children learn very quickly to identify which values relate to a given situation, and, for the most part, they are eager to practice them. After only two terms on this program, students at Border Christian College are using

values language confidently, and they can readily identify the signs of success (and failure). In addition, students now feel more confident about resolving relationship difficulties. For example, they are beginning to identify their problems in terms of a value, rather than by complaining about a particular person—“Tommy and I can't decide what is fair” versus “Tommy is being mean to me.” The new program has also helped to build conviction and courage in students, empowering them to know and do what is right. It is the perfect complement to formal, classroom teaching of faith and worldview issues.

### Awards System

The Border Christian College values program is enhanced by a weekly awards system. During the Friday chapel period, students are chosen to wear a golden “Honor” badge for one week as a sign of their commitment to the week's value. This has proved very successful. Students wear their badges with pride while shopping on the weekend, to church, and even to bed. Photos of those being honored each week are published in the school newsletter, sent home along with a lovely certificate, and laminated for inclusion in the foyer display. More than one child from each class may be chosen, and the same student may be chosen more than once in the year if he or she shows outstanding commitment. Students are also aware that no one will be honored if no child in a class displays adequate commitment. They thus perceive the program as having integrity as well as an element of surprise.

In just a few months, *The Healthy Relationships Program* has become a very important part of the primary school program at Border Christian College. Although the high school level is not officially taking part, its students and teachers participate informally, and hence the entire school has benefitted. As it consolidates and enriches Seventh-day Adventist Christian values, faith, and worldview, the program has empowered students and teachers and enhanced the school climate.

**I**srael was commanded to pass on stories, lessons, and divine commands from one generation to the next, not just occasionally or casually, but continually and to write them “upon the heart” (Deuteronomy 6:6). The goal was to “pass on the torch,” to hand down eternal, timeless values from generation to generation.

Seventh-day Adventism holds that its unique set of beliefs, its worldview, and its set of values are so important, both now and for eternity, as to justify expenditure of massive amounts of effort and money. Adventists believe that true education builds conviction and must make us “more authentic in spirit. . . [and] more humane in our dealing with others.”<sup>26</sup> Given its origins, goals, and committed teachers, the church's education system is uniquely positioned to achieve this. Our experience at Border Christian College has shown the importance of imparting values and developing faith and worldview

# HEALTHY RELATIONSHIPS

This week we  
are thinking  
about

THANKFULNESS



Do for others what  
you want them to  
do for you!



Last week we  
appreciated



for displaying

CONFIDENCE

## Successful values education provides opportunities for young people to think through the consequences of their actions.

in students—qualities that will pilot them through this life and into eternity. ☞

**Julie Stefani** is a Primary Teacher with more than 15 years experience. At the time this article was written, she was teaching the first and second grades at Border Christian College on the border of the eastern states of Australia, New South Wales and Victoria. Her family recently moved to Adelaide, South Australia, where she is teaching at Prescott Primary Northern, the largest Adventist primary school in Australia. She began using the Healthy Relationships Program at her new school, and it generated so much interest and enthusiasm that by the end of the first term, the entire school was taking part. Mrs. Stefani is completing her M.Ed. degree from Avondale College in Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.



### NOTES AND REFERENCES

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