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Giving voice to educators: Primary school teachers explain how they promote values to their pupils

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Abstract
Values are the trans-situational goals guiding human attitudes and behavior (Schwartz, 1992). As early socialization agents, teachers have a responsibility to promote democratic values of citizenship to create an inclusive, fair, and sustainable society, necessary for individual and collective well-being (OECD, 2019). By facilitating social and cognitive development through social interactions, the school setting helps spark curiosity, leading to reflection and adaptation. Across the curriculum, teachers use strategies like imitation, modelling, priming, and discussion to help children make sense of the world (Makarova et al., 2024; Oeschger et al., 2022). Yet little empirical evidence exists to support how teachers achieve this. The present study gives voice to educators through the personal experiences of ten UK primary school teachers. Semi-structured interviews were conducted, lasting between 50 and 90 min. Data was analyzed in two stages: First, a deductive structuring content analysis identified how values of self-transcendence versus self-enhancement and openness to change versus conservation, as defined in Schwartz's (1992) model, were reflected in the interview data. Second, an inductive thematic analysis yielded the following themes: mechanisms of value transmission; implicit vs explicit instruction of values; values that are most difficult to teach; value transmission through taught lessons; the role of collective worship and cultural days; opportunities for value transmission in the wider school environment; and the role that a school culture and ethos play in the transmission of values. This study supports the view that values are promoted through a variety of methods and across all areas of the school environment.

Keywords Values · Value transmission · Teachers · Primary school · School curriculum · School culture

Introduction

The role of a teacher is to educate. As education has a responsibility to equip individuals with democratic values of citizenship, attitudes, and beliefs, teachers play an active role in promoting and transmitting values to create a more inclusive, fair, and sustainable society

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(OECD, 2019). Indeed, the significance of values education has gained widespread recognition within the global (UNESCO, 2020) and European educational landscape (Council of Europe, 2016). For example, underpinning the teaching standards in the UK is an ethical obligation to uphold professional values, relationships, and integrity, which have at their core a commitment to promoting respect, care, honesty, and trust into all children (Department for Education, 2021).

However, little is known about how teachers achieve this. Values are thought to be acquired and internalized through socialization during childhood, with situations that arise in the home, playground, or classroom providing key learning opportunities for children (Liem et al., 2012). The school setting promotes the integration of pupils into society by transmitting and reproducing social structures which underlie democratic and constitutional order (Fend, 2008). However, there is little empirical evidence to disclose the role that teachers play and the explicit and implicit methods used to share values with pupils. By creating ethical classroom environments, value acquisition can occur through teaching, modelling, and reinforcement in the classroom (Boekaerts et al., 2006). Therefore, understanding the methods and processes through which teachers promote values to their pupils is important for our appreciation of how children learn and to provide valuable insight into how school shapes children's values.

Schwartz's theory of values

Values are desirable goals that serve as guiding principles in a person's life (Schwartz, 1994), and they have been portrayed as cognitive structures, acquired in early childhood, that function as central concepts of the self (Döring et al., 2016; Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). Being relatively stable, values can be used to categorize social groups, cultures, and societies, to track change over time, and to predict and explain motivation of attitudes, behavior, and well-being (Cieciuch et al., 2016). The present study is conceptually embedded in the most widely researched theory of human values as developed by Schwartz (1992). Empirically tested using data from over 80 countries, Schwartz identified ten value types (Schwartz, 1992, 2014). Organized along two bi-polar dimensions, these basic values result in four *higher-order values* (HOVs), with *openness to change* values (including *stimulation*, *self-direction*, and *hedonism*) contrasting with *conservation* values (including *tradition*, *conformity*, and *security*) and *self-enhancement* values (including *power* and *achievement*) contrasting with *self-transcendence* values (including *universalism* and *benevolence*) (Lins de Holanda Coelho et al., 2022; Schwartz, 1992, 1994; see Fig. 1).

Value socialization in childhood: the role of primary schools

Values express a shared understanding of what is important, both at an individual level and at a societal level (Schwartz, 1992, 2014). Important value development occurs during childhood, with value socialization taking place in the environment the child encounters, including the family and school as well as through interactions with significant adults and peers (Benish-Weisman et al., 2022; Döring et al., 2016). Already at the onset of primary school, that is at the age of 5 years, children have a meaningful understanding of values, which becomes more mature as children grow older (Knafo-Noam et al., 2024; Twito-Weingarten & Knafo-Noam, 2022). Research with 5–12-year-olds showed that older children naturally talked about their values in more abstract terms, generalizing beyond specific concrete instances (Shachnai & Daniel, 2020). Throughout the primary school years,

Openness to Change
Self-Transcendence
Conservation
Self-Enhancement
Self-Direction: Independent thought and action
Universalism: Understanding, caring and concern for the welfare of all people and for nature
Benevolence: Caring for the welfare of close others
Tradition: Respect and commitment for customs and ideas of the family, traditional culture, or religion
Conformity: Restraint of actions likely to upset or harm others, and violate social expectations
Security: Safety, harmony, and stability of society, of relationships, and of self
Power: Social status and prestige, control or dominance over people, resources
Achievement: Personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards
Hedonism: Pleasure or sensuous gratification for oneself
Stimulation: Excitement, novelty, and challenge in life

Fig. 1 Schwartz's (1992) model of human values

the school environment increasingly unfolds its influence on value socialization. Teachers serve as key cultural agents who typically align with broader societal values and play a pivotal role in communicating societal and communal values through their daily interactions in the classroom (Schwartz, 1992). However, very few studies have assessed schools' role in shaping children's values, and of these, most have considered differences in the values of children from different schools (Bacchini et al., 2015; Knafo et al., 2008) rather than looking specifically at the role of teachers within the school, particularly at primary school age. Research by Killen (1991) suggests that personal concepts emerge through social interactions as early as in the preschool classroom. In terms of a child's cognitive and social development, the teacher's role therefore is to provide children with choice, fostering self-development and discovery, social competence, and academic achievement. Consequently, by providing children with choice and time for reflection, the teacher-child social relationship can play a dynamic role in their affective development. Furthermore, the role of school ethos and climate has been found to guide teachers' value principles, subsequently affecting the socialization and development of pupils and their acquisition of cultural knowledge and practices (Berson & Oreg, 2016; Hohmann, 2016). Through the promotion of a school

culture, values permeate teaching and school life (Drakenberg & Malmgren, 2013), shaping children's character by imparting pro-social values of universalism or benevolence.

Previous research suggests that values education is manifested through teachers' classroom management approaches (Barni et al., 2018) as well as through their intentional educational and socialization objectives centered around values (Auer et al., 2023; Tamm et al., 2020), However, there is still limited empirical evidence to explain the mechanisms at play, particularly among primary school teachers. Findings from a study of primary school teachers in Turkey suggest they employ a range of techniques to promote values, including modelling, using true stories which include a range of values, using situations to explain right from wrong, and continually questioning classroom events with students (Yildirim, 2009). In a similar vein, Thornberg and Oğuz (2013) explored teachers' views on values education in a comparative study in Sweden and Turkey. While this study identified many similar themes relating to the methods of accomplishing values education, it perhaps did not go far enough in exploring primary teachers' experiences and observations across a range of subjects and contexts within the whole school setting, an area this study aims to address.

The present study is situated in the UK, where values play a key role in the primary school curriculum and all schools are required to promote the fundamental British values: democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, as well as mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs (Department for Education, 2021). In the UK, primary education incorporates the ages of 4 to 11 years, with teaching separated into three distinct stages: Early Years (reception, ages 4 to 5 years), Key Stage 1 (KS1) (years 1 to 2, ages 5 to 7 years), and Key Stage 2 (KS2) (years 3 to 6, ages 7–11 years). State schools refer to schools which receive funding from their local authority or directly from the government, whereas independent or private schools charge fees to attend, instead of being funded by the government. UK primary schools are guided by the Department for Education's (2021) teacher's standards and the recommendations for teaching provided in the national curriculum (Department for Education, 2015). The teachers' standards specify that "a teacher must (…) demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils." Personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education is a non-statutory subject and should be taught in all schools. However, while there is guidance on what should be taught (provided in the introduction to the national curriculum), there is flexibility on how it is to be delivered as teachers are considered to be best placed to understand the needs of the pupils within the context of the community in which they teach, while upholding fundamental British values as a minimum. However, teachers must "ensure that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit the vulnerability of their pupils" and "must show proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach" (Department for Education, 2021).[1]

Insight into the role of value socialization through the UK's primary education is necessary to support teachers and schools and to provide evidence of best practice. Insight can be derived from a formal setting, which might include the classroom environment and communal settings like assemblies and lunch, whereas a more informal setting might

[1] Within the British educational landscape, ethos has been defined as "core values, attitudes, beliefs and culture of the school and classroom" (Scottish Government, 2018, p. 3) and has been closely linked to school climate. Not only can the school ethos be reflected in terms of recruitment of staff and creation of a school motto or slogan, in which all members of the school community are active participants, but by conforming to the school rules and practices, children are acquiring new norms and values and then through their interaction, are actively helping to shape and mold that culture.

include play times and forest school,[2] which offer children less structured learning opportunities with more creativity and freedom in their interactions while also helping children to develop socially, emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Some theorists have highlighted a difference between explicit values (referring to an official curriculum of values) and those values that are learned implicitly (embedded in school and classroom practices). Implicit value transmission links to the automatic mechanisms at play and as such may be more abstract and less consciously taught whereas explicit value transmission is more effortful (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). Nevertheless, education in the school and the home relies on the implicit and explicit assumption that value priorities in childhood can be shaped through the teaching of value-relevant behavior (Vecchione et al., 2016).

In the UK, revisions to the National Curriculum under successive governments in 2022, 2008, and 2014 raised the profile of a personal, social, health, and economic (PSHE) education. While the recommended non-statutory citizenship guidance varies by key stage, the skills are reminiscent of Schwartz's value paradigm and include equality and rationality, tolerance and respect, concern for the rights of individuals and society, an ethic of care and responsibility, and an emphasis on justice, self-respect, honesty, and decency (Department for Education, 2015). However, there appears to be limited published research exploring the effectiveness of such programs post the amendments, or which explain how values education in PSHE works. Furthermore, little is known about how these value priorities are promoted at other times of the school day.

The ecosocial context of value transmission in school

Our conception of values education in primary schools (Makarova et al., 2024) is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's (2005) socio-ecological systems theory: Children's values develop in an interaction of a range of systems and contexts. Values are key in the micro-system (through proximal processes in the classroom), in the meso-system (e.g., the effect of school climate, Berson & Oreg, 2016, and the interaction between home, school, and the wider school environment, Oescher et al., 2021), and in the macro-system (e.g., educational policy and planning, the national curriculum; Oescher et al., 2022). While knowledge and skills acquisition is individual, it is socially constructed through interactions in which individuals learn by making sense of the world (Ferreira & Schulze, 2014). According to the OECD conceptual learning framework, multiple layers (school, home, community) operate simultaneously in directing learning, in which children are active participants. In line with Fend's (2008) theory of school, we see learning opportunities as shaped by the interplay between the individual and the environment (Baumer et al., 2011), with the curriculum serving to legitimize and reproduce the norms, values, and behavior of society.

Mechanisms of value change

While there is an element of choice in selecting values, individuals are not always consciously aware of the motivating force of their values (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011), suggesting values can be changed or primed to challenge existing beliefs. Bardi and Goodwin's

[2] Forest school offers child-centered learning through play, exploration, and supported risk-taking, delivered via regular sessions and hands-on experiences in a natural setting.

work exploring the mechanisms at play when inciting value change suggests it can occur via an effortful process and/or via an automatic route. Bardi and Godwin (2011) identified five facilitators of value change: (1) priming (automatic schema change through repeated activation of an alternative schema), (2) adaptation to a new life situation, (3) identification with a person or a group (where both (2) and (3) may occur through effortful or automatic processes), (4) consistency maintenance, and (5) direct persuasion attempts (where both (4) and (5) occur through effortful processes). While this model is not specifically related to education, many of the observations can be applied to the school setting. Transferring this argument to the classroom context, teachers acting as role models might create a range of strategies to equip children with values and to think about these beliefs both formally and informally (Yildirim, 2009). Environmental cues can automatically prime certain values without much awareness, thereby challenging existing values if those values are not held too strongly or if repeated often enough such that over time, a new schema is accepted (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). In the classroom, the teacher might promote value change through repeated modelling and priming, or by making values concrete using examples, therefore making them more believable. Priming helps children to apply what they know in a new situation, thereby promoting curiosity and allowing cognitive engagement. Creating student awareness of the relevance and context of the value encourages cognitive engagement with learning, helping children to retain what they have learnt and apply it. Furthermore, value change may occur after a long discussion with others about the value, hearing about different points of view, prompting individuals to rethink their initial beliefs (Maio et al., 2001, 2020). The attractiveness of the message conveyer (i.e., the teacher) can also lead to value change, for instance, if the teacher has strong conviction and is persuasive in the manner with which they deliver their message. However, Bardi and Goodwin (2011) found that direct persuasion often results in resistance, which might explain why within a school setting, teachers increasingly encourage reflection rather than punishments to be meted out as a consequence of a child breaking a school rule, rules which are usually based on values to be upheld. Value change can also occur through adaptation, often endorsing values that are encouraged in the social environment.

The present study

The present study focuses on primary teachers' personal experiences and uses examples from their practice to explore how they perceive values to be transmitted in the classroom across a range of curriculum subjects and their perspective on how they might promote values both in a formal and informal setting. Given the absence of qualitative data exploring value transmission in the school setting, the current study aims to fill a gap in the literature by giving voice to primary educators. Focusing on the direct impact of teachers in the primary setting is particularly relevant given the lack of empirical evidence focusing on value transmission before adolescence and given that childhood is the critical period during which values are shaped and learned (Döring et al., 2016). Furthermore, it provides valuable insight into how primary school teachers shape children's value development, thereby providing guidance for values education in schools. This also offers a starting point for assessing the effectiveness of the provision of values in teaching lessons as well as within the wider school setting.

The aim is to uncover the values that teachers share with their pupils and the methods used to promote these, focusing specifically on teachers' thoughts and experiences about their teaching practice. The underlying premise of this research is that teachers have to some extent internalized the values of the UK education policy, curriculum, and school such that the values they promote reflect their working environment. However, it must be remembered that teachers have their own histories and experiences and therefore cannot be value-free. However, their ethical code of practice requires them to act in the best interests of their pupils. Proposed values are promoted through traditional means (direct teaching, the use of rewards and punishments, and the development of a character education) while at the same time inculcating a more progressive approach using reasoning, deliberative discussion about moral dilemmas, and rational thinking across the curriculum.

The following research questions were studied:

(Q1) What values, as framed within Schwartz's (1992) model, do primary school teachers consider important to promote to their students?

(Q2) Within the school community, through what methods and contexts do primary school teachers promote values to their pupils, and what difficulties might they encounter?

Methods

Our qualitative study employed semi-structured interviews with scope for sharing examples from practice to explore the practicing teachers' views on personal values, teaching methods, and values education (Runswick-Cole, 2011).

Participants

The participants of the study were recruited through convenience sampling and comprised ten primary school teachers (nine females and one male) ranging from 31 to 50 years of age. Eight participants identified as "White British," and two participants identified as "White European."[3] The ten primary schools the teachers worked at are located in the South or Southeast of England in a predominantly urban setting. Statistics for the local authorities the ten schools are located in show that most are in areas of low deprivation, with one school in the 10th centile (least deprived area), one in the 9th centile, two in the 8th centile, three in the 6th centile, two in the 5th centile, and one in the 2nd centile.[4] Six teachers worked at state schools, and four teachers worked at private schools. The ethnic diversity of the local authorities the six state schools are located in is limited, with between 80 and 95% of residents identifying as White British[5] (across the UK, the percentage is 74). Participants were known to one of the authors prior to the study commencing. Their

[3] "White British" and "White Other" are two of the ethnic groups included in the UK census: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/style-guide/ethnic-groups/#how-the-groups-were-chosen.

[4] English indices of deprivation 2019 (including data on income, employment, education, health, crime, barriers to housing and services, living environment): https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/media/5d8e26f6ed915d5570c6cc55/IoD2019_Statistical_Release.pdf

[5] Data from the 2021 census: https://www.ethnicity-facts-figures.service.gov.uk/uk-population-by-ethnicity/national-and-regional-populations/regional-ethnic-diversity/latest/#download-the-data.

We have not included ethnicity data for the local authorities of the private schools as these schools' catchment typically goes far beyond the local authorities.

professional experience as teachers ranged from 7 to 28 years. Eight of the teachers work as classroom teachers at the primary level (school years 2–6), one is currently a qualified teacher working as a recovery curriculum specialist[6] (school years 1–6), and one is assistant head of a junior school (i.e., a school covering school years 3 to 6).

Procedure of data collection

A series of questions was used in the semi-structured interviews, all of which were devised to be open-ended, with scope for sharing examples from practice. Each interview started by asking participants to consider the values that were important to them and how these were applied across their various roles. The further questions were then presented in two steps according to our two research questions.

To address the first research question, participants were asked to consider what they understood from the term "values" and then asked to articulate which values would be desirable to share with their pupils and how these would be promoted through their teaching. Following this, the interviewer shared a diagram of Schwartz's (1992) model of values via the chat function and offered a brief explanation. Schwartz's model was then visible for the remaining time of the interview, serving as visual aid that teachers could refer back to.

To address the second research question, the next sequence of questions asked the participants to consider the age at which children might start to understand values and to articulate which values might be demonstrated first. Then, they were asked to name any values which were more difficult to teach and to explain why. These questions were more specific in nature, focusing on teachers' practical experience. Participants were asked to provide examples of their teaching of values through PSHE and other academic lessons as well as throughout the school setting (assemblies, play times, forest school, etc.). This allowed for the sharing of practical methods of promoting values, experiences observed in the classroom and wider school setting, the role of the headteacher, and any evidence of a school culture. The concluding questions in this sequence focused on any obstacles or barriers participants had encountered in the teaching of values and whether they felt children's values had changed in recent years.

All participants signed a consent form and were debriefed afterwards, providing more details about the overall aim of this research. This is in line with ethical considerations (*informed consent* and *transparency*) of prescribed practice and ensures that participants fully understand the nature and purpose of the research (including any aspects not previously disclosed) to avoid influencing their responses and maintain honesty and openness between researcher and participant by promoting trust and respect. The study was approved by the psychology ethics committee at the University of Westminster, UK.

The interviews were conducted between 13th April and 13th June 2022 via Microsoft Teams or Google Meet and audio-recorded using a mobile phone. Notes were taken during the conversation to ensure that all relevant topics were covered and to provide relevant follow-up questions. Each interview lasted between 50 and 90 minutes and was typically informal and conversational, according to semi-structured conventions (Runswick-Cole, 2011). The audio records were transcribed verbatim, information that could reveal a participant's identity was removed, and they were uploaded into MAXQDA (Version 2022) for data analysis. Participants were not compensated for their participation.

[6] Provides additional supplementary learning and support for children post pandemic.

Data analysis

Structuring content analysis

The data analysis to answer our first research question followed the method of *structuring content analysis* (Mayring, 2015). Teachers' responses to the first interview question ("What values do you think should be shared with the students in your class?") were categorized according to which of Schwartz's higher-order values they reflect. In this deductive, top-down approach, a primary coder first identified meaningful chunks that expressed values, where the length of these chunks ranged from a few words to an entire sentence (e.g., "In our school we had a value cycle. […] things like respect and politeness and kindness, resilience.") Both the primary coder and an additional coder then assigned this chunk to the higher-order values it expresses. MAXQDA Intercoder Agreement Function was then used to calculate kappa (k) (Brennan & Prediger, 1981) as a measure of consistency between the two coders. Additionally, the intercoder reliability (ICR) was calculated using Cohen's kappa (Cohen, 1960). $\kappa = 0.91$ for Brennan and Prediger's kappa and $\kappa = 0.94$ for Cohen's kappa showed both good interrater reliabilities.

Thematic analysis

To address our second research question, a thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006) was applied. Thematic analysis is an *inductive*, theoretically flexible approach to identify, analyze, and report patterns in the data—the themes. The themes emerged "bottom up" from the interview data, where we constructed themes based on what was said, rather than looking for hidden nuance or meanings behind the words (Boyatzis, 1998). As Braun and Clarke (2006, p.78) highlight: "Through its theoretical freedom, thematic analysis provides a flexible and useful research tool, which can potentially provide a rich and detailed, yet complex, account of data." Addressing the "anything goes" criticism often faced by qualitative analytic approaches, Braun and Clarke (2006) have developed precise and detailed guidelines for the steps to undertake. These steps are as follows: (1) familiarization with the data by transcribing the interviews verbatim; (2) line by line coding with key words and phrases highlighted; (3) grouping together individual data responses to isolate patterns in responses and construct themes; (4) after initial groupings, themes were analyzed semantically and refined through further analysis of the data, constantly questioning how they relate to the codes; (5) themes were reviewed and labelled and defined.

This inductive approach meant that the themes identified were strongly linked to the interview data themselves, and the interviews were coded *without* trying to fit them into our theoretical framework (i.e., Schwartz's, 1992, values model, or Bardi & Goodwin's, 2011, model of value change), so that our thematic analysis was data-driven. This allowed us to give voice to educators in this empirically unexplored field to reveal patterns in the data without imposing theoretical limitations in terms of focus or structure. It was only after codes had been organized into themes that we progressed from describing and explicating the themes to interpretation, aiming to "theorize the significance of the patterns and their broader meanings and implications" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84).

Being a qualitative analytical approach, "the researchers cannot free themselves of their theoretical and epistemological commitments, and the data are not coded in an epistemological vacuum" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.84). Reflecting on the qualitative analyst's role in our study, they were both a psychology researcher and a qualified primary school teacher in the UK with teaching experience in both state and independent schools. Based on our knowledge of socio-ecological systems of values education, their initial pre-conception was that both personal and societal values were instilled by teachers in schools, through daily interactions and teaching methods, but they could not predict *how* this would be explained by participants and which methods they would use.

Results

Findings for research question 1

In the interviews, teachers highlighted how the values they held were consistently important across contexts.

> [My values] guide the way I want to live, they guide the way I treat other people, the people I surround myself with, and then within a school environment, the same really, I want to be able to be as honest as possible so that I can sleep at night.
>
> In the same vein, participants saw values as going beyond the personal sphere, as the values they thought were important '[...] for humanity's sake. Because the world would be pretty miserable if the next generation did not have these agreed important values.'

Framed within Schwartz's (1992) model, the value types reflected most strongly in the transcripts of teachers' interviews were understanding, appreciation, tolerance, and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature (i.e., universalism) and preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact (i.e., benevolence). In contrast, the values that were reflected least were personal success through demonstrating competence according to social standards (i.e., achievement) and control or dominance over people and resources (i.e., power). When speaking about values of conservation (tradition, conformity, and security), teachers often referred to the pandemic, and when speaking about values of openness to change (self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism), teachers often referred to self-directed learning. Table 1 presents the frequency distribution of coded chunks of text per higher-order values and shows that values

Table 1 Frequency distribution of coded chunks of text in the interview

Higher-order values	*N*	%
Self-transcendence (universalism, benevolence)	75	38.5
Conservation (tradition, conformity, security)	50	25.6
Self-enhancement (power, achievement)	28	14.4
Openness to change (hedonism, stimulation, self-direction)	42	21.5
Total	195	100.0

Table 2 Sample excerpts—chunks of text coded per value type

Value type	Excerpt
Universalism	*So, it comes under that umbrella, but I need to teach them that there are people who don't live like they do, and they have to accept people who may have different points of view, different experiences so that is my priority, I think* *Tolerance is what I'm looking for. Tolerance to people who may not appear or behave the same as you do*
Benevolence	*Respect, team-spirit which is one I haven't mentioned but, in a class, it's one that I put something on the board which says, Yes, we don't like everyone but it's very important that if you're asked to work with somebody, that you find a way to work with that person and then you don't have to think about it again*
Tradition	*We teach fundamental British values as well which are incorporated into everything that I've just talked about*
Conformity	*A recognition definitely of right from wrong. A basic understanding of that* *[…] being polite, having good manners […]*
Security	*So, in their situations they can recognise harmful behaviours as well as positive behaviours because of the many safeguarding issues that we meet*
Power	*[none coded]*
Achievement	*We do a lot in early morning work, and I try to do it in different ways, so they can work out, which ones they need to learn, which ones they know, so it's that kind of encouraging them to know that they do need to do some work but actually if you want to achieve something, that's just the way it is*
Hedonism	*[none coded]*
Stimulation	*As a teacher, you are a performer, and so I always tell them, well done for having a go, even if it's not right, but well done for trying*
Self-direction	*It's not all about achievement in the long term, it's about self-progress and self-achievement […]* *[…] so personal goals and growth is important*

of self-transcendence were most strongly reflected in the data, followed by conservation, then openness to change, and finally self-enhancement. Table 2 presents sample extracts for each of the value types.

Findings for research question 2

With regards to question 2, seven core themes were constructed from the data: (a) mechanisms of value transmission, (b) implicit vs explicit teaching of values, (c) values that are most difficult to teach, (d) value transmission through taught lessons, (e) the role of collective worship and cultural days, (f) opportunities for value transmission in the wider school environment, and (g) school ethos and the impact of the headteacher. Examples of teacher commentary to support and illustrate these themes are provided below.

Value transmission: mechanisms, routes, and challenges

Themes (a), (b), and (c) portrayed teachers' views of mechanisms of value transmission, highlighting explicit and implicit routes they identified and challenges they faced.

Theme a: mechanisms of value transmission This theme captures the methods used by teachers to promote the values they find important. Participants made the distinction between a persuasive approach and maintaining a professional distance, "trying not to preach but lightly touching on things" that are seen. The most common method of transmission mentioned by participants was through modelling, which can be shown in every interaction:

> I don't think you can help it really, as a teacher. Just by being there, by being a consistent presence, you are a role model for them and how to behave. And you put them right when they get it wrong. You also praise them when they get it right, which is actually more powerful.

> I think that it's really important to role model those skills with the children and how you treat the other adults and members of staff within the school as well.

Other methods of promoting values included "[…] examples and little scenarios, getting them to act things out." By facilitating classroom meetings, teachers felt that they were preparing or priming children to become active participants in the formation of values, so that they could apply this understanding in the future. At other times, teachers found that they could assign roles, such as leader/facilitator or scribe/timekeeper, thus giving children accountability for their application of values within a real-life context. The participants felt that real-world examples helped children to take responsibility for their learning of values and to apply them in context. For instance, rather than taking a ball away from children who are not playing nicely, asking, "what would your coach do if you were cheating […] or laughing [at a team-mate] if they missed a goal[…]?" and helping them to see how the values in school should not be different from the values outside of school.

Theme b: implicit vs explicit teaching of values This theme portrays the distinction participants made between implicit and explicit teaching of values. The codes within this theme explore how automatic and effortful processes work in the formation of values and value change, and the processes teachers described—even though not phrased in this terminology—map onto Bardi and Goodwin's (2011) model of value change. In view of explicit teaching, the fundamental British values as part of the formal curriculum were referred back to regularly (promoting fundamental British values as part of SMSC in schools; Department for Education, 2014).

> The empathy, depending on the children, they're not very empathetic – it's like that phrase, putting yourself in someone else's shoes. A lot of children know that phrase, but they find it hard. So, you find yourself really explicitly trying to teach that… whereas other things, I think are more obvious to children and you can say, well that wouldn't be kind, would it? And they would just know and try to follow through on it.

One participant made the point that, while explicit values may be easier to teach, they still need to be modelled to the children through social interactions to see how this works in practice. The examples below show the importance of using explicit and implicit mechanisms together:

> I suppose it's those kind of things that you're not actually saying 'We value kindness' but you're discussing, rewarding, highlighting those values in a much more subtle way.

> Some things definitely have to be taught explicitly where if there has been a situation of some kind then I think it needs to be addressed very explicitly [;] other things you can recognise and almost hope that they pick up on that, and you're modelling good behaviours and you're recognising other people's good behaviours and the children then are picking up on that, rather than you saying 'Sit on your chair properly' saying 'Brilliant, how well you are sitting on your chair' and them recognising it that way.

Theme c: values that are most difficult to teach Challenges experienced by teachers emerged as a distinct pattern and were subsumed under a theme, which reflects problems teachers encountered when teaching values. Teachers highlighted potential conflicts between values and also between values prevailing in different contexts (school versus home):

> So, on the one hand, we're saying, go out to win, and on the other side, we're saying, don't worry too much because it's ok to take part, and I think that's a really difficult balance and then added to that, you have the parental and home influence which for some children can be [...] hugely influential [...].

The conflict identified through the example above demonstrates how children need to develop the maturity of thinking of the values that are important to themselves as well as how their behavior impacts those around them. Here, we can see that teachers empathized with a child's perspective of potential value conflict between home and school. In line with this need to think beyond the self, one participant highlighted the difficulty for children in moving beyond the self-centered existence of being all about the "me". Universalism values linked to caring for the welfare of all people and nature were seen as quite difficult to grasp without the use of concrete examples, as their worlds are still very small and self-centered, revolving around the people they know. As one participant commented, "[...] you can teach children to care for the environment and understand that they're living in a wider world but it's quite abstract."

Four participants explicitly gave examples of having taught a lesson about kindness and thinking of others, and the recognition that children were not very empathetic or that soon after having taught that value, in the playground they were having to go over the same concept again. For instance, recognising that "[...] kindness: it's very easy to teach [...] and 2 s [later] in the playground, they're being unkind to each other. So, I don't think it's the teaching part, I think it's the application."

A number of teachers also highlighted they found some children may lack agency, self-motivation, and resilience, which may pose a challenge to teaching self-direction values without sufficient motivation and encouragement:

> Self direction and independence are difficult to apply. We have the children who can do anything and are so confident and then you look at their work and you think, they haven't got this at all. And then you have the children who are whimpering saying, 'I just don't get it...it doesn't make any sense!' And you say, can you just read it through again because I believe you have the skills to do this. You know, you have to weigh up the two and try to be reassuring and motivating.

> We often have those conversations at school, particularly with this class I've got. The fact that you can't expect someone to do everything for you. And that, yes, I'm your teacher. I'm here to help you. I'm here to teach you. But I'm not here to write 30 stories about the Stone Age. That is definitely a big thing that has transferred down to this class in particular. You know, work hard for what you want.

Value transmission through taught lessons

A distinct theme emerged for how teachers saw values being transmitted through taught lessons.

Theme d: value transmission in taught lessons The teaching of *PSHE* provided a designated time in the week for pupils to learn about values. However, all teachers interviewed believed that value transmission occurred throughout the school day every day, both in the classroom and through the wider school setting. Teacher judgement was also thought to play a significant role in the transmission of values, particularly when relating the application of school values to children whose values may look very different. One participant gave an example of promoting the HOVs of *self-transcendence* and *conservation* towards a traveler boy whose use of language and cultural upbringing was very different from those of the other children in the class, but also modelling to the child acceptable and expected classroom behavior and interaction. Participants believed they promoted a range of values across all subjects throughout the school day. In *Mathematics*, children were taught the values needed to collaborate and work as a team, to persevere, and to show critical thinking and problem-solving skills. In *History*, some participants highlighted how they promoted values of democracy when learning about the suffrage movement. History also provided an opportunity to teach children how to recognize power and hierarchy when learning about the ancient Egyptians or slavery, or values of hedonism, security, and independence in ancient Greece. Almost all participants seemed to be embracing the opportunity to discuss values of universalism linked to the natural environment in *Geography*, from years 2 to 6; however, as identified earlier, these may only be understood when evoked through example and discussion. One participant highlighted that as well as finding out about all the animals and layers and creating artwork linked to the rainforest, some of the best critical thinking skills emerged during discussion and when children could apply their understanding to the topic through discussion with concrete examples that they could relate to:

> […] we were Mrs. Sloth and she wrote a letter to the loggers saying you're killing my home, and this is the impact it's having on my family […] but then also thinking about […] these loggers and their families who need money […] how do you weigh up what's more important […].

Participants felt that creating discussions around these global issues provided an opportunity for children to see the wider impact of losing the environment as well as recognizing that a discussion could take place without anyone getting upset and falling out. In *Science*, teachers were prepared to put their own stamp on planning by adapting the curriculum to make science learning more inclusive and diverse. *Physical Education* and sporting fixtures provided an opportunity for promoting security and conformity (playing safely and playing by the rules), achievement (going out to win), and self-direction (trying one's best).

Value transmission beyond taught lessons

The themes (e), (f), and (g) present patterns of codes speaking to opportunities for value transmission teachers identified beyond taught lessons.

Theme e: the role of collective worship and cultural days Teachers felt that formal activities like assemblies and cultural days provided an opportunity for “collective worship”: exchanging ideas and reflecting on values on behalf of aspects of moral or cultural and spiritual togetherness, and a means to celebrate and show respect for others, with rewards aligned to these school values. Due to the number of codes and depth of extracts, a distinct theme was constructed.

> We have a celebration assembly on a Friday, so that is the one where we invite parents in as well. And the certificates we have are based on our behaviors: Being Ready to Learn; Being Responsible; Being Respectful. So, we put things under those headings, to try and embed those values.

Similarly, assemblies were used as an opportunity to promote values of equality and democracy and to experience how these values looked in practice, through the election of Head Boy, Head Girl, and Prefects for example. During some assemblies, the theme could be linked to raising awareness of a value nationally, like Earth Day, Black Lives Matter Week, and Mental Health Awareness Week, in which values linked to tradition, conformity, and universalism were promoted, discussed, and reflected upon. Tradition is linked to respect and commitment for customs and ideas of the family, traditional culture (reflected in Black Lives Matter because it thinks about where those black lives originated from and their transportation through slavery to the new world) or religion, and conformity links to restraint of actions likely to upset or harm others and violate social expectations (Mental Health Awareness and Black Lives Matter offer opportunities to discuss how we can be empathetic to people whose experiences differ from our own). Teachers found it particularly beneficial to offer opportunities to discuss how we can be empathetic to people whose experiences differ from our own. Visiting speakers and cross-curricular work during a multicultural arts week provided one school with an opportunity to bring these values to life and to demonstrate “acceptance and difference”.

Theme f: opportunities for value transmission in the wider school environment This theme depicts opportunities teachers identified in less structured sessions like forest school, as well as lunch and play times to promote values of compromise and understanding. As one participant identified, “[…] understanding that if you are going to go and join the game, you cannot change the game. You may think that your game sounds a bit more exciting but if you’re joining a game then you cannot then change the rules, which is what we have a lot of at the moment.”

This thinking highlighted that in that game situation, you might need to put aside individual preferences to work as a team by showing understanding and compromise. School trips provided another opportunity to promote values. One participant gave the example of a trip to the Houses of Parliament and the Supreme Court, where values linked to power, tradition, and conformity could be seen in practice. Because forest school sessions were often child-led or overseen by leaders rather than teachers, it could also provide an opportunity for children to promote values to teachers as participants, teaching them values by demonstrating the rules of the game, helping each other, and being kind.

> [Forest School is an opportunity for children to] step outside of their comfort zone […] having that self-awareness of what they can do, that awareness that they've managed to achieve something, the determination to have a go and get stuck in rather than just watching or sitting there.

Theme g: school ethos and the impact of the headteacher Based on our interviews, it was clear that the school ethos played a huge part in how teachers felt about their role within the school and the values that were shared. When teachers had a role in shaping these values and believed in them, they were promoted and shared more convincingly: "I absolutely love our school motto which has been part of the school forever. I use it at home as well and it is that everyone works to their personal best. And that looks different for everyone and that is absolutely fine. We're not looking for perfection, but we are looking for your personal best at all times, whether that is in a drawing, a maths calculation, a performance to the parents, being a friend […]."

A collaborative approach to values, almost like a class or school pride, was often perceived as the most successful method of promoting values, by demonstrating to the children that it is important how individuals at all levels within the school are treated and that this is how individuals grow and mature. While each of the schools in this study was at a different stage of their journey with regard to school ethos, eight participants spoke exclusively about participants believing in their school values and had a role in shaping these, under the direction of strong leadership from the headteacher. In fact, seven of the participants talked about the development of a school ethos with involvement from everyone (teachers and support staff, governors and pupils). Furthermore, there was an expectation that by teaching at an individual school and by sending a child to that school, you were buying into the ethos of that school. One participant discussed the influence that her head had on the school environment:

> The HT [Head Teacher] has a real presence here […]. This school is all about working together as a team. […] I'm more inspired as a teacher because of his general ethos which is about thinking big, using questioning. […] But his expectations are crazy high but they [children] respect that, as do we as teachers.

Whether implicitly or explicitly, values appeared to permeate across all areas of the school environment. Values that were considered important to teachers themselves were promoted as part of their role, during interactions involving all members of the school community. While teachers saw value transmission as important, they recognized that their role should not be indoctrinating, rather a guide for life-long learning and development, and the building blocks for developing and applying values in later life.

Discussion

The richness of the data from the interviews with primary school teachers in the present study showcases the breadth of value transmission across the curriculum and school setting. These insights into values education are particularly relevant given the absence of empirical evidence about how values are transmitted in the primary school setting. The ecosocial context of value transmission in primary school encompasses processes on micro-, meso-,

and macro-level and the interaction of these (Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Döring et al., 2017). Within the classroom, a broad bandwidth of values is present: the values held by pupils, the values held by teachers as well as their value-related educational goals (i.e., the values they would like their pupils to hold), the values shared within the primary school, as well as values in the school curriculum, all of which guide children's values and actions as well as learning and engagement (Barni et al., 2018; Berson & Oreg, 2016; Pudelko & Boon, 2014; Scholz-Kuhn et al., 2023). Exploring the values that were important to teachers and that they aimed to promote in the students they taught, it was possible to map participant responses closely to Schwartz's basic theory of values (1992).

In response to research question 1, primary school teachers considered values from around Schwartz's circle important to promote to their students. Reflecting what tends to be most important to adults and children around the world (Döring et al., 2015, 2016; Schwartz & Bardi, 2001) as well as recent analyses of school curricula (e.g., Oeschger et al., 2021), values of benevolence and universalism were highlighted throughout the interviews, while only every seventh value-laden statement expressed the opposing values of achievement and power. Values of conservation, with reference to security, conformity, and tradition in the classroom, were expressed to about the same extent as values of openness to change, with reference to self-direction, stimulation, and hedonism. While the UK is one of the most individualistic countries in the world and in Europe (Hofstede, 1980), with an emphasis on self-directed learning and exploration (which is often highlighted in European curricula as well; e.g., Oeschger et al., 2022), the British Department for Education (2021) emphasizes a school's legal duty to safeguard and promote the welfare of young people under 18 years of age, according to formal school safeguarding policies. Additionally, the data in this study were collected during the pandemic, which shifted the focus away from openness and towards conservation values (Daniel et al., 2022).

In response to research question 2, teachers found they transmit values within the wider school environment, which is shaped by the school culture and ethos and across a range of curricular as well as extra-curricular activities. Mechanisms through which teachers promoted values to their pupils conceptually map onto Bardi and Goodwin's (2011) model of value change and included child-centered *modelling*, *priming*, and child-directed *discussion and reflection*, which had been found to provide one of the strongest means of promoting values and culture in past research (Kärtner et al., 2020). Across a range of subjects, teachers found providing opportunities for action to be a strong driver of value transmission. This links in with recent empirical findings, which show that not only do values predict future behavior, but also does behavior predict future values, suggesting opportunities for value-related action as a facilitator of value change (e.g., Scholz-Kuhn et al., 2023; Döring et al., 2016). In the teaching of values, teachers in this study experienced a conflict between home and school, to model and share examples of a way to see and act, which is different from the home environment. Participants specifically identified the need for values to be *consistently* expressed across a range of contexts so that without awareness, children could be primed to understand how this looked in practice. Such stimuli might include work presented on displays, formal comments written in books, and awards disseminated in assemblies, helping children to contextualize the value that is being promoted. Priming in this sense refers to the way an individual's exposure to a stimulus influences the response to a subsequent prompt, without awareness of the connection. These can often be words or images related to their everyday lives. If children witness displays and comments in books which uphold the values of the school, these stimuli can impact subsequent behavior and incorporation of values (cf. Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). Across interviews, teachers referred to both implicit and explicit mechanisms of value transmission, which conceptually maps

onto the automatic and effortful route of value change in Bardi and Goodwin's (2011) model. Teachers' accounts of value transmission processes as they have experienced them in the classroom were hence closely aligned with the few available empirical insights as well as with scientific models. Teachers highlighted some values which were more challenging to teach, including more mature and/or abstract concepts.

Considering opportunities for values education in primary school, teachers gave examples of values being promoted across the academic curriculum, through standalone PSHE lessons; through exploratory and collaborative problem-solving in *Mathematics children learnt* self-direction and stimulation values; by exploring universal values around the environment in *Geography*; and by learning about democracy and tradition, power, and hierarchy in *History*; values of power, achievement, and tradition were promoted. Outside of the classroom, values relating to self-direction and stimulation were promoted through play, while even the formal setting of lunch taught the values of being benevolent, tradition, and conformity by being polite and respectful to the catering staff and sharing a meal together. Forest school provided an excellent way to learn informally about one's impact on the wider world in a child-centered manner, as well as creating mini-communities and clubs to foster a sense of belonging. These clearly link to Schwartz's self-transcendence values.[7] Collective worship and assemblies (e.g., class council, students assemblies) were found to help teachers promote a range of values linked to conformity and benevolence, appreciating other pupils' individuality, showing respect for others, and valuing democracy and citizenship (Sant, 2019).

Mapping these findings onto a socio-ecological model of value formation in primary schools (see Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Makarova et al., 2024) reveals that while teachers were aware of the impact of the macro-system (the primary school curriculum in England as well as fundamental British values) and the meso-system (the headteacher, school ethos, school climate, and values education in the wider school environment), teachers highlighted the crucial importance of processes in the classroom—*the microsystem*. Within the classroom, teachers' values drive their goals and desirable behaviors, with teachers' personal values often guiding their attitudes, which in turn affects student learning and engagement (Barni et al., 2018). While teachers cannot be "value free," by showing a variety of perspectives and through stimulation, they can promote a broad range of values (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003) leading to mutual respect in the classroom and helping to build positive relationships. In fact, teachers not only promote their own values, but the values they wish students to have for humanity's sake, thus providing the next generation with these agreed important values central to quality teaching (Barni et al., 2018).

Referring to processes in the classroom, teachers' portrayal of *how* they are teaching values can be mapped onto all five facilitators of value change, as identified by Bardi and Goodwin (2011): priming, adaptation, identification, consistency maintenance, and persuasion. Importantly, this study shows that while explicitly stating key values highlighted in the curriculum or school (i.e., values that prevail in macro- and meso-system), teachers have experienced direct persuasion attempts (preaching values) as being ineffective and emphasize that effective processes of values education need to combine explicit with implicit or automatic processes.

This study highlights the importance of providing opportunities for children to understand how values look in practice. Veugelers and Vedder (2003) argue that values get their

[7] It must be noted that teachers in this study applied their understanding of Schwartz's values as introduced at the start of the interview but were also guided by their own conception of values.

real meaning within a context, which may explain why the teachers in our study believe in the importance of facilitating opportunities for children to move their understanding from the abstract to the real. By linking the learning of values to broader curriculum subjects and real-life examples, children can see what this value looks like in different settings, stimulating the exchange of skills between different subject areas (Veugelers & Vedder, 2003), thereby giving greater meaning to the value but also showing its wider application beyond the classroom (Maio et al., 2001). Day to day interactions help children to internalize the values displayed by teachers and their peers, which can help direct students' learning goals and influence their achievement motivation, raising children's awareness of community practices (e.g., raising money for charity, learning about the environment, and taking part in national mental health awareness programs or events linked to Black Lives Matter), helping children to understand their role and responsibility as part of something larger than themselves. Through these techniques, teachers can ignite student curiosity and awareness, essential for facilitating cognitive engagement (Bardi & Goodwin, 2011). It is a means to reshape values in a manner that children understand but is also critical to ensuring children have a safe, secure, and welcoming environment in which values can be transmitted and modelled (Bäumer et al., 2011). Presenting opportunities for young people to engage their cognitive skills through the teaching of attitudes and values creates a sense of agency. By facilitating opportunities for children to be active participants in their learning, through interaction between other students and the teacher, they learn to appreciate what is important to them and to exercise their sense of purpose and responsibility, able to adapt to the demands of a complex, modern society (OECD, 2019).

Strengths, limitations, and future directions

By applying Bardi and Goodwin's (2011) model of value change to an educational setting, we gathered greater insight into how mechanisms that facilitate value change and value transmission work within a primary school setting as well as the difficulties teachers might encounter when teaching values implicitly versus explicitly. This study supports previous studies highlighting the role of processes within the classroom while also showing the impact of school ethos and the leadership or vision of the headteacher (see, e.g., Berson & Oreg, 2016; Hohmann, 2016) in how values are perceived and shaped in the school setting (Drakenberg & Malmgren, 2013) particularly in terms of gaining buy-in from all members of the school community.

In terms of limitations, the sample was relatively small, with a narrow age range of participants, who were practicing in schools with limited ethnic diversity. Furthermore, it is possible that because all participants were known to the researcher, they may share similar values. This could be overcome by interviewing other teachers at the same schools to see if their values aligned, particularly in terms of school culture and ethos, and problems encountered when promoting values. Combining data collected from teachers about their teaching of values in the classroom with longitudinal data on children's value development across the primary school years could provide evidence of the effectiveness of various techniques. The present study presents data from the UK only; a future cross-cultural study, giving voice to educators from diverse backgrounds in primary schools across Europe, could offer a broader perspective.

Author contribution All authors whose names appear on the submission made substantial contributions to the conception or design of the work; or the acquisition, analysis, or interpretation of data; or the creation of new software used in the work. They all drafted the work or revised it critically for important intellectual content, approved the version to be published, and agreed to be accountable for all aspects of the work in ensuring that questions related to the accuracy or integrity of any part of the work are appropriately investigated and resolved.

Code availability All authors confirm that all data and materials, as well as software applications or custom code, are available, support their published claims, and conform to field standards.

Declarations

Ethics approval and consent to participate The study was approved by the psychology ethics committee of the University of Westminster, London. All participants signed a consent form before data collection and were debriefed afterwards, providing more details about the overall aim of this research. This is in line with the ethical considerations (informed consent and transparency) of the approving ethics committee. All authors agree with the content and give explicit consent to submit. The authors obtained consent from the responsible authorities at the institute/organization where the work has been carried out.

Competing interests The authors declare no competing interests.

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Current themes of research:

Value development in childhood and adolescence; Values education in school settings; Learning and teaching of statistics; Educational data science; Learning in digital environments; Cross-cultural research.

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

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Emma Jones

Current themes of research:

Value transmission in the school context; Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) practitioner perspectives on supporting families exposed to domestic violence and poor mental health.

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

Jones, E., Oeschger, T. P., & Döring, A. K. (2023, August 22). *Giving Voice to Educators: Primary School Teachers Explain How they Promote Values to their Pupils*. In A. K. Döring (Chair), European Conference of Educational Research (ECER) [Symposium]. University of Glasgow, Glasgow, Scotland.

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Thomas P. Oeschger

Current themes of research:

Value transmission in the school context.

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

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Prof. Dr. Elena Makarova

Current themes of research:

Value transmission in the family and school context; Acculturation and school adjustment of minority youth; Gender and career choice; Digital transformation in education; Cross-cultural research.

Most relevant publications in the field of Psychology of Education:

Leino, R. K., Kaqinari, T., Makarova, E., & Döring, A. K. (2024). Connectedness with Students as a Key Factor in Online Teaching Self-efficacy, *Computers and Education Open*, p. 100192. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.caeo.2024.100192

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