

On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

Introduction

It has struck me before that the HEART values can be deceptive: they are Good Values that are about fairness and decency and respect and striving for something better for us all and for the world we inhabit. They are also exacting, in some ways unforgiving, and intensely difficult to live out daily. Carrying these values at heart can prove challenging to all, and they require of leaders in particular a higher standard than they might encounter in some others.

The fault lines of our beliefs, values and actions are no more visible than in our approaches to behaviour, communication and need, and these ruptures can quickly become heated sources of debate and recrimination between different colleagues with very similar values, according to how these values are interpreted and find their way into action. Inclusion overall can be a challenging matter to negotiate - one person's inclusion can be another's exclusion; one person's healthy boundary, seen by another as obnoxious and arbitrary.

Through the prism of the HEART values we can articulate some of our deeply held beliefs in light of our shared values, and through this articulation, we can achieve more clarity together about what it means to meet the needs of all without penalising the few; how we can support those with the greatest need without impacting upon the learning rights of their peers.



On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

High Expectations centre on clarity, articulation of a standard, and a refusal to accept less for a student than that standard. It is less about what might be accepted *from* a student (it is our role to teach them the skills and behaviours necessary to meet these expectations after all). High expectations are not hopes. They are not hit and miss, pass or fail. They are consistent, exacting, and the unspoken undertone must always be that “You are worth this level of effort, you *can* achieve this standard, and *we will not patronise you* by lowering an expectation we can support you to meet”. The key for school leaders is determining what the High Expectations actually mean (is there a universal high expectation? If not, what accounts for this difference?) and what support must be in place for all to meet them. Where expectations are not reached (by adults and by students) what happens? What conversations occur to ensure clarity, consequence and support? How much of that conversation demonstrates an unswerving belief that the person *can and deserves to achieve*? Through these conversations, and the language we use, we can just as easily build up a child’s self-confidence as tear it down, we can connect or disconnect. We can make ourselves enticing - a community within which a child wants to belong - or exclusive - somewhere that compounds what is likely already to be a sense of rejection, of unloveliness.

We hold high expectations as means to communicate what we want, and at which standard a child or adult can expect to achieve. Without regular, detailed reinforcement of what these expectations are and why they exist, the expectations themselves become a meaningless hurdle to clear or at which to fall. Without a passionate commitment to seeing every child succeed, they become a means by which to filter out the vulnerable and leave them out in the cold.

With expectations high and clearly articulated, our energies can best be spent on enabling a child to meet them - by arranging with them where the uniform will come from, by modelling the work we wish to see, by teaching them the communication skills necessary to succeed. We do not compromise on, or lower the standard for any child or adult because all children are worthy - in this respect we are inscrutable, ruthless even in our decision to uphold a standard. This can be tempered by compassionate execution - by language of connection, of hope, of reconciliation as we support the child to reach it at their point of readiness to accept our help. If in the intervening time they need space, thinking time or a different kind of support, we allow it. If they need different interventions from different people, we broker it. At the moment of readiness we give them what they need to succeed, highlight their achievement, and enable them to move on.

Some questions we might ask ourselves as school leaders as we set our expectations might be:

- What do these mean for all children?
- What do these mean for those experiencing the greatest disadvantage?
- Whose expectations are they?
- What if they are different, in different parts of the school? Department? Classroom?

Expectations serve as a determiner of just what and how much support a child needs. Our curriculum, both formal and ‘hidden’ focuses on knowing our place in the world and knowing how to interact with and affect it. High expectations support children to learn a language that they can choose to step into, out of and beyond, once they have mastery of it - be it attire, articulation or approach.



On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

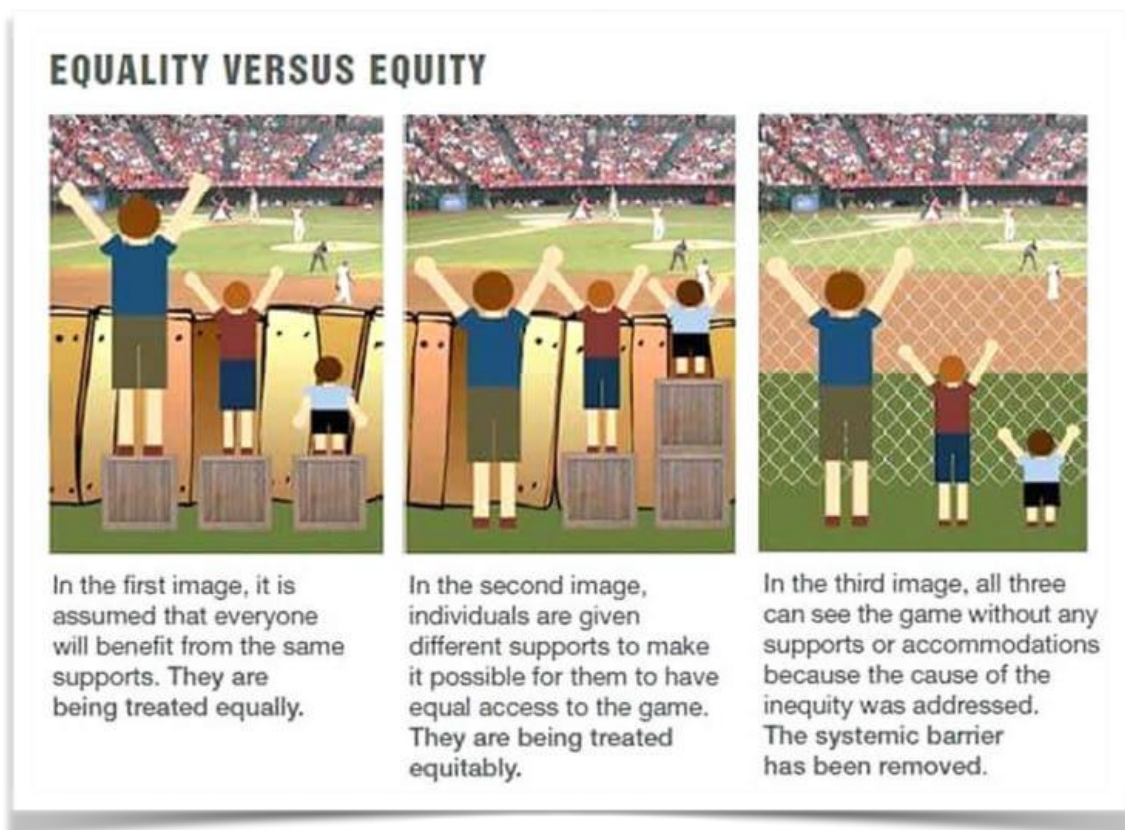
Equity can really only be achieved once expectations are clarified and need is revealed. Equity focuses on giving everyone what they need. This might be equipment, uniform, skills, language - whatever is lacking should be provided, either solely by the school or jointly with families, so that each child can access all that a school environment can offer for them. Equity sits both alongside and in contrast to concepts of fairness.

Fairness in the eyes of some is about having the same approach with every child; for some children fairness lies in all having the same rewards and consequences. In this respect, equity can be seen as the enemy of fairness. However, nothing can be more fair than determining levels of support based on levels of need, and levels of need become apparent from a setting and articulation of a standard.

Equity demands of us that we re-evaluate ourselves and our expectations - equity at work should prick our conscience and cause us to reflect. "Is this difference I see in need exposed by an expectation that is fair and helpful? Is there bias at work, and if so, what needs to change?"

Equity highlights for us where resource should be targeted, and where advocacy should begin. We might articulate a reasonable standard, we might provide all that is needed to meet that standard - but does the gap between the need and the standard demand us to take action beyond our school? Is there a community need? A policy failure? We can and should aim to resolve the issue in the short term in the interests of the child: we can and must use our influence as civic actors to address the issue in the long term in the interests of the community's children.

There is a famous image relating to equity:



It's not perfect, but it's helpful in some ways. In our example, the tools available to schools might be the boxes, but the main barrier - the wooden fence in this case - may be something beyond school. As civic actors it is incumbent upon us to act to remove the fence whether it be in our school, in our school system, or in our community. Equity drives the conscience of the values-driven leader.

On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

All children speaks to me of belonging. All children should be able to see themselves in our schools and in our systems. All children should have their voices heard and their experiences validated. All children should be able to access the support necessary to achieve agency, and all children should be challenged towards this end.

All children includes children with significant learning need, with attachment difficulty, with adversity in life...as well as all other children. Meeting the needs of All Children is probably the most exacting standard of all the HEART values, simply because of the competing demands it embodies.

As leaders, when we review the statistics around our systems of inclusion, we need to see all our children in that system - receiving the rewards and recognition they deserve, and getting the help they need, in classrooms and buildings that are calm, focused, supportive and alive. Our systems should expose and recognise need. If, as leaders, we discern that a group of children is over- or under- represented in any area, the responsibility lies with us to first understand that phenomenon and then to address it both immediately and over time.

In the busyness of a thriving school, it is easy for a child to be missed. We the leaders need to be the Arthur Christmas of our school, not only noticing but sounding the alarm if "A child has been missed!" [watch this scene; it's brilliant]. We need to devise systems of the appropriate scale to ensure regular human interaction - not by chance but by design - regular connection and regular recognition. We need to be the noticers and our radar needs to be attuned to the needs of the cohort and the child: every child.

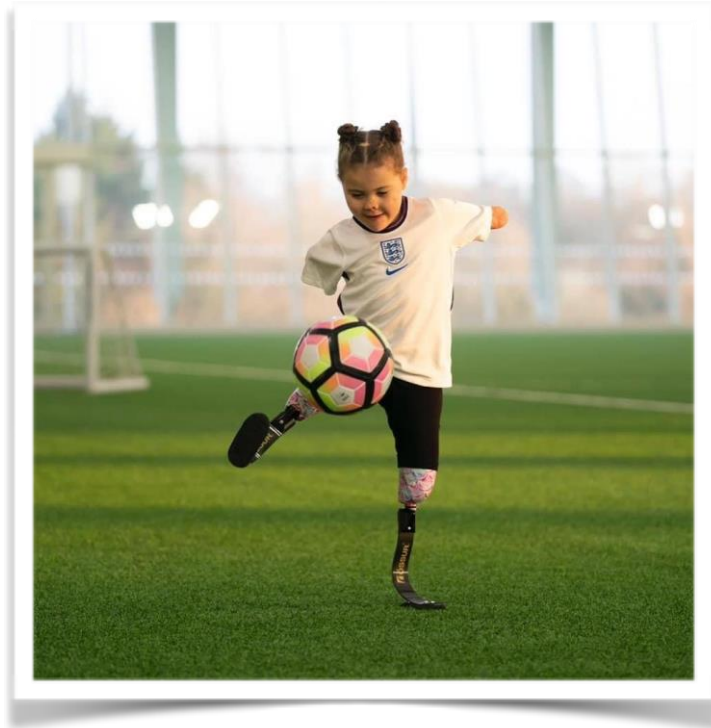


On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

Resilience is both a quality that children possess, and something that needs to be explicitly taught and developed. It is needed of us as practitioners, and it comes from a deep understanding of ourselves and our own needs and triggers. Resilience is developed through adversity and it different in different areas of our lives - physical, mental, emotional and learning resilience are all different, and can operate at different levels in the same person at different times.

Resilience is not about avoiding adversity: it's about being supported through adversity and developing the skills and habits to traverse it again, if need be, without being broken irreparably. Resilience is not a human term, but a manufacturing one. In this sense it means to 'recover quickly' or to 'return to shape'. As humans this can be difficult, and as educators we are responsible for creating the conditions that enable a child to build their own resilience with our help.

Resilience comes through a mixture of confidence, social support, adaptability and purposefulness, and these are all things that we can both incidentally and strategically develop in our children through relationships, environments and systemic choices.



On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

Togetherness is critical in schools where All Children thrive. The value of Togetherness supercedes the concept of tolerance, which is not about 'tolerating' per se, but about co-existence of ideologies and beliefs that are different - and sometimes directly in opposition to one another. There is a place for celebration of difference and a place for deep acceptance of otherness. There is a place for modelled togetherness in schools: of the need to directly oppose another person, to be able to resolve conflict, and to enable space for one another's views. Togetherness is a threat to some, because strength in diversity does not fit all worldviews. Togetherness can be considered in itself to be an act of defiance, a form of activism. When a community Iftar happens in a school during the period of Lent and on the day of Passover, celebration of this coexistence is powerful and flagrant, something of which we should be proud. There are times when togetherness is deeply tested and in schools the concept must win out. It must be modelled and taught. It will find its way into our behaviour systems and our review of student behaviours and prejudices, and it is a critical element of conflict and communication that must be allowed and enabled to be taught. In terms of societal benefit, togetherness may be the most important HEART value, as it brings into being young people and young leaders who are able to engage in and navigate difference, otherness, conflict, fear, acceptance, coexistence and celebration. Our understanding of, and use of, this concept must deepen and grow as adults alongside the children we educate. Some of the most powerful learning moments in a school are those that follow conflict. Taking the opportunity to teach tolerance and togetherness to young people is a critical step in achieving equity for all. Deep togetherness leads to a greater and deeper understanding of the difference in need between one young person and another - through each other's eyes. When children demand fairness they do not always demand the same thing for all - they demand action for all. Children often know when other children need support. They show the kind of tolerance we need to amplify when they recognise that 'his/her consequence for a behaviour choice may not be the same as mine, but I can see that s/he does have one...and I know s/he needs different support to me.' When we model and articulate this with children, we help them to understand the other values we espouse. Togetherness does not mean sameness, and it doesn't necessarily denote harmoniousness. We can be together and disagree; we can be together and be different. In fact, coming together in our difference is the most powerful act and one which demonstrates to the world what can be achieved when we allow space for diversity of thought, of experience and of being.



On the HEART values and what they demand of us: behaviour, communication and need

Conclusion

A sense of self, a sense of place in the world and deep agency is what our curriculum is designed to instil and reveal within our children - it is what our systems are there to develop. We do this as the empowered adults who understand how to set and hold boundaries for all children, especially the most vulnerable who need them most, in a way that is child-centred as our standard, and adult-led as our duty.

What our children demand of us is consistency, authenticity and respect. We must work on ourselves as the models of our HEART values, remembering always that our children will infer and internalise far more from our actions and characteristics than ever they can from our words. For us, the key is to articulate clearly and then demonstrate this articulation with exceptional action. I would go so far as to say it barely matters what a school's behaviour system is, as long as it embodies, demonstrates and develops the HEART values in both adults and children. It doesn't matter what the rules are as long as those who enforce them do so with the kind of humanity and passion that our children need to see modelled.

It matters that we understand what children themselves are communicating to us with their behaviour, and that we find ways to meet the needs that these communications betray.

It matters that we communicate our expectations, our need, our presence, our struggles and our values with clarity and integrity.

It matters that we learn the art and the science of eliciting learning within respectful, boundaries relationships.

It matters that we become the architects of the environment, the arbiters of standards and the diagnostics of need.

It matters that we recognise when we have made mistakes.

It matters that we reflect and allow our conscience to be driven by what our systems tell us.

It matters that we understand the hallmarks of excellence and that we demand this for our children, of ourselves as well as of them.

It matters that we engage in reflective practice, checking every day that we have expected it of ourselves and practised it intentionally.

It matters, because **community** is created by shared language and standards, and children need and want **belong** to communities that recognise them as whole people. When children belong, they engage; when they engage they learn, and when they learn and develop in a positive nurturing environment, there is no limit on the standard they can reach, as individuals, in community and in society at large.

