



## Leading the way on positive education

18 and 19 November 2005

Conference report

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**“You must be the change you wish  
to see in the world.”**

**Mahatma Gandhi**



## Dear Colleagues in Leading the Way in Positive Education

Spirituality in education matters! At the heart of this spirituality is love which is an essential ingredient in the flourishing of humanity and a sustainable civilisation. It has been said that Education is the transmission of civilisation. What sort of civilisation are we creating and what sort of civilisation do we want to transmit?

The inspiration behind the Positive Education Conference came from love; this love was cultivated and grew and then permeated the gathering of deeply committed educators. The love was then nurtured, experienced and expressed in many ways over the two days. This experience was the flourishing of humanity intertwined with an understanding, conscious and unconscious, of what sort of civilisation we wanted to see and pass on.

The conference has had an overwhelmingly positive feedback from the delegates and reflects not only the thirst for new approaches and leadership in education but leads us to believe that we can make a difference. We will need to lead by example with a strong sense of purpose; working together and supporting one another. There may be resistance but the strength of our motivation and intention will help us succeed.

We should not underestimate what can be achieved in a small country such as ours. We have a unique opportunity in our 'Best SMALL Country in the World' to truly be world leaders.

Let us be together in our purpose.

**Victor Spence**

**General Secretary**

**Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association and Positive Education Steering Group Chair**

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“I hope we can make change happen.”

conference delegate

**This two-day national conference in Edinburgh, organised by the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association with management support from Children in Scotland and design support from Dancehammer, was the UK's first 'Positive Education' conference.**

**It was inspired following the growing concern that the results-driven culture, which underpins our education system, is failing to meet the needs of children. This concern is leading more and more educators to question long-established teaching and learning methods.**

**The conference, *Leading the way on positive education*, offered delegates an opportunity to learn from those who are pioneering new ways of learning and teaching – methods that focus on 'values' rather than 'results' and on children's personal and social well-being rather than their levels of academic attainment.**

## **Taking positive education forward**

At the close of the conference, an inspired delegate voiced his concern at its close that the “passion and energy for change felt in this room” would not be translated into action. He added: “This conference has shown that there are people out there who want to change. I hope we can make change happen.”

Joey Walters, of the leadership consultancy Dancehammer, volunteered to initiate the process to take this challenge forward – a co-ordinated push for a more balanced approach to educating our children.

**If you would like to be part of a Positive Education mailing list email Radha Singh at Children in Scotland: [rsingh@childreninscotland.org.uk](mailto:rsingh@childreninscotland.org.uk)**

## ...academic success alone is not a passport to a fulfilled and happy life.

"We still live in a results-driven society emphasising material gain and more, more, more. There is a down-side to trying to churn out future adults in order to satisfy economic goals. Education for greed does not make people happy", said Victor Spence, Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association.

Speaker, Neil Hawkes, an international education consultant, said he is worried about teachers. "They are on a conveyor belt of paperwork and initiatives – so much so that there is a danger that they will become human doings rather than human

beings. When a human looks back on life, are they going to say 'I did a lot' or 'I experienced a lot'? Stressed staff inevitably impact on pupils."

One delegate said pressure on schools to ensure pupils' academic attainment levels meet government targets have made them stressful places for teachers, and so they have become stressful places for pupils and parents too. "If teachers felt more freedom, schools would be more relaxed and happier places to be."

However, despite this concern, there was widespread acknowledgement, with endorsement from His Holiness the Dalai Lama, that education should not be delivered without an element of competition. The problem with today's system is that focus on academic success has neglected the importance of children's overall happiness and well-being – despite the fact that academic success alone is not a passport to a fulfilled and happy life.

*"You do not just teach a child to read,  
you teach them to love reading."*

Professor McGettrick

In an inspirational speech, Professor Bart McGettrick, said: "Education is about the flourishing of humanity and within that, attainment and achievement are both important. It would be wrong to think they were not important. What we mustn't do is give them more attention than children's personal and social well-being."

One delegate said many teachers view the curriculum as a "straightjacket". Both Professor McGettrick and Neil Hawkes agreed this negative view must be challenged. The latter acknowledged that there are "increasingly rigid structures in schools", but added: "We must see that structure as nothing more than scaffolding that can be built around, not a cage."

And Professor McGettrick described the curriculum as "the means to the end". He said: "Education and learning are on a double helix, they have two strands. You do not just teach a child to read, you teach them to love reading, so that they will carry on doing it."

"I asked myself 'what links these two strands together?' and I concluded that the answer is 'relationships'. Children learn through the smiling eyes of a teacher. The problem is that government pays far too much attention to content. If only it paid more attention to relationships, we would have a very different kind of education system."

His Holiness the Dalai Lama said both personal and social well-being, and attainment and achievement, are required in humanity. "In education, the two must be unified."

**Positive education empowers children to step beyond the limitations of negative thinking and encourages them towards a future of greater choice, confidence and happiness.**

**Leading the way on positive education** enabled contributors to share valuable experience and a number of inspirational examples of good practice.

## **Cultivating warmheartedness**

### **His Holiness the Dalai Lama**

Three main points emerged from the Dalai Lama's remarks and answers to questions. First, the desire to achieve lasting happiness and to avoid suffering is universal and natural to all human beings – not exclusive to, or dependent upon, any religious faith. As the Dalai Lama asserts in his book *Ancient wisdom, modern world: ethics for the new millennium*: "I believe there is an important distinction to be made between religion and spirituality. Religion I take to be concerned with faith in the claims to salvation of one faith tradition or another, an aspect of which is acceptance of some form of metaphysical or supernatural reality ... Spirituality I take

to be concerned with those qualities of the human spirit – such as love, compassion, patience, tolerance, forgiveness, contentment, a sense of responsibility and a sense of harmony – which bring happiness to both self and others."

Second, the Dalai Lama shared the observation that, as social beings, the lasting happiness we all seek is achieved primarily through relationships. In turn, those relationships are shaped by the attitudes and intentions that we bring to them. The more we choose to refrain from causing others' suffering and the more we promote their well-being, the happier our own lives become.

Third, the development of these qualities of the human spirit does not happen

naturally or by accident. Indeed, the Dalai Lama reminded conference participants that in modern societies, much of the socialisation of children promotes selfishness and isolation – rather than compassion and a sense of responsibility. Consequently, young people's dedication to the well-being of others is undermined – and, with it, their own chance for lasting happiness is diminished.

It is the Dalai Lama's view that most of the problems besetting our children and youth – from substance abuse and anti-social behaviour to school failure and economic marginalization – are born of the lack of an explicit, continuous cultivation of warm-heartedness among



“Knowledge is important but much more important is the use to which it is put.”

The Dalai Lama

children. He notes that giving priority to the development of the ethic of restraint, the ethic of virtue and the ethic of compassion from birth until adulthood is not an alternative to an emphasis on academic achievement. It may, in fact, be the most efficient and effective path to better schools and better students.

The Dalai Lama said that those who are academically successful, but lack a good heart fall prey to “an attitude toward others that is likely to be a mixture of envy of those in positions above them, aggressive competitiveness toward their peers and scorn for those less fortunate”. He added: “Knowledge is important but

much more important is the use to which it is put. Indeed, if we had to choose between learning and virtue, the latter is definitely more valuable. The good heart, which is the fruit of virtue, is by itself a great benefit to humanity. Mere knowledge is not.”

Fortunately, there is no need to choose between learning and virtue. The Dalai Lama is neither anti-intellectual, nor dismissive of academic achievement among the young. What he observes is that the balance has tipped too far in the direction of academic development and away from spiritual development (in a strictly non-religious, ethical sense).

What he advises is that this imbalance be corrected as swiftly and fully as possible.

In practical terms, this means that the current fixation on academic examinations and “teaching to the test” must stop being the priority of school leaders and politicians. Recent media coverage has highlighted growing concern over the culture of testing pupils and the pressure that this puts on pupils, parents and teachers alike. In England and Wales, where exam results are published as league tables, the problem is particularly acute. Scotland is beginning to see a shift away from such a narrow focus on targets and academic performance, backed by the scrapping of league tables, a national review of the curriculum and the biggest UK research project yet into teaching and learning by the Institute of Education.

Widening the curriculum to give greater weight to currently under-emphasised subjects and activities is not a cure-all.

It will not automatically remedy the



“Ultimately, of course, the importance of concern for others is learned not from words but from actions.”

The Dalai Lama

fundamental imbalance in the effort devoted to developing children’s minds versus cultivating children’s warm-heartedness.

Similarly, it is not enough to teach about virtues. Treating children with respect day-to-day and explicitly nurturing and reinforcing their respectful behaviour toward others are far more potent than merely telling children that it is nice to be respectful. As the Dalai Lama points out: “Ultimately, of course, the importance of concern for others is learned not from

words but from actions ... what children learn about ethical conduct has to be practiced first. In this, teachers have a special responsibility. By their own behaviour, they can make children remember them for their whole lives. If this behaviour is principled, disciplined and compassionate, their values will be imprinted on the child’s mind.”

Just as the testing pendulum and indifference to promoting warm-heartedness has gone farthest in the United States, so too, some of the most

interesting attempts to restore balance also are to be found in America. A book entitled *Teaching children to care: classroom management for ethical and academic growth, K-8* by Ruth Charney is gaining popularity as a corrective to the excesses of recent years. An associated website ([www.responsiveclassroom.org](http://www.responsiveclassroom.org)) is a good starting point for interested child-related practitioners and policymakers.

Although there is no direct connection between the responsive classroom movement and the Dalai Lama, there is an obvious harmony between their perspectives. Both want all children to learn to be both academically successful and genuinely warm-hearted.

Near the end of the question time at the Positive Education conference, the Dalai Lama chuckled kindly in response to a participant’s remark and said that getting the balance right between intellectual and spiritual development in not just a task for the next generation. It must begin with us and it must start now.

## Introducing values education

### Neil Hawkes

Values education includes valuing the self, others and the environment, establishing a common vocabulary of values words, the use of silence to enable the pupils to be a reflective learner and crucially, the teacher as the role model.

Neil Hawkes told educators at the conference: "The educational agenda expects us to be positive role models for pupils to emulate. We can only do this if we feel good about ourselves – our self-esteem is high and our internal world

secure. Caring for yourself can take many forms and includes being aware of your physical, mental and spiritual selves that require nurturing. It is not selfish to give yourself both time and space, for paradoxically you will then be able to give more to others and feel more able to cope."

Email Neil Hawkes if you would like to hear his ideas on how to introduce a values-led curriculum and how to avoid excessive stress: **Neil.Hawkes@btinternet.com**

Click here (link to 'Values Ed.doc') for more information on how to introduce a values-led curriculum.

"It is not selfish to give yourself time and space, for you will then be able to give more to others."

Neil Hawkes

## Education for Peace

### Glenda Thornton

In April 2006, Glenda Thornton, project manager of the Education for Peace with the World Peace Prayer Society, will launch a teacher training programme for educators enabling them to introduce 'peace education' into their classrooms. The 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' schools programme has been piloted at a primary school in Scotland. It begins by providing the opportunity for teachers and children to experience where peace begins - 'May Peace be in my Heart' - and expands gradually throughout the programme to include friends and family, school, community, country, all living beings - through to 'May Peace Prevail on Earth'.

Visit **www.wppsallanton.btinternet.co.uk** for further information on the 'May Peace Prevail on Earth' schools programme, or email **Glenda@worldpeace.fslife.co.uk**

“P4C transforms individuals by changing their values, behaviour and emotions.”

Lizzy Lewis

## Philosophy for children

### Lizzy Lewis

‘Philosophy for Children’ is a curriculum for children and young people aged between six and 16, conceived in the 1960s by Professor Matthew Lipman who appreciated that children learn to think much as they learn to speak. He developed a new model of learning – ‘communities of enquiry’ – in which teacher and children collaborate with each other to grow in understanding, not only of the material world, but also of the personal and ethical world around them. Controlled tests in America in the 1980’s showed that not only could children’s reasoning powers be enhanced through philosophical enquiry, but so could their reading and mathematical skills.

‘Philosophy for children’ (P4C) is delivered by the educational charity Sapere.

Lizzy Lewis, of Sapere, said: “At the heart of P4C methodology is a process that enables children to feel empowered, which raises their self esteem and therefore their ability to learn. On another level they are learning life skills that are meaningful and useful to them. Furthermore, the children are genuinely interested in the questions they ask and are more motivated, curious and thoughtful about what they are doing. I am particularly interested in the ways in which P4C transforms individuals, for example by changing their values, behaviour and emotions.”

Visit [www.sapere.org.uk](http://www.sapere.org.uk) or email [admin@sapere.org.uk](mailto:admin@sapere.org.uk)

## Soul in education

### Mari Hollander

At the Findhorn Foundation, an international centre of adult education, and of personal development and spiritual transformation, the ‘soul’ is viewed as a guiding and creative influence in people’s lives.

Mari Hollander, chair, said: “When teachers are able to work in ways that acknowledge and attune to the inner nature of a child, a classroom community or their own personal growth, they have a distinct advantage.”

Hollander’s workshop offered delegates examples of approaches to inner listening, deep enquiry and honest communication for any given situation which creates opportunities for fruitful sharing – circle time within the classroom context.

Visit [www.findhorn.org](http://www.findhorn.org) for further information or email

[mhollander@findhorn.org](mailto:mhollander@findhorn.org)

## Confident children

### Beth Edberg

Beth Edberg is a teacher and writer who has developed a programme to encourage children and adults to explore their world together through the use of "confident communication". Her workshop explored the different ways to use positive, confident words during interactions with children, including reading stories.

For further information visit [www.beeallyoucan.com](http://www.beeallyoucan.com)

## Living values

### Donia Keith

Donia Keith's workshop encouraged delegates to see the good qualities within themselves, and to develop a deeper understanding of why this is important. She used Living Values Education Programme materials, which help educators, parents and care-givers to enable children and young adults to explore and develop twelve universal

"Values-based working is a means to raise respect in classrooms, staffrooms, playgrounds, parent/teacher groups."

Donia Keith

values – co-operation, freedom, happiness, honesty, humility, love, peace, respect, responsibility, simplicity, tolerance and unity.

Keith said: "Values-based working is a means to raise respect in classrooms, staffrooms, playgrounds, parent/teacher groups and can also be applied directly in the handling of bullying, challenging behaviour, multi-cultural settings, special needs, handling of stress and other coping skills.

"The importance of constantly working on our own development of how we better express our latent positive qualities

through our behaviour, is that it defines our ability to 'live' those qualities or values in our dealings with others.

"It is recognised that working with values is hard work, as through Living Values Education we endeavour to be the 'sample and example' to young people and to colleagues. However, it is also good work, and lies at the heart of forming positive experiences in young people that will take them forward in life to become confident and caring adults."

For further information email [lvep\\_donia@liferoute.co.uk](mailto:lvep_donia@liferoute.co.uk) or visit [www.livingvalues.net](http://www.livingvalues.net)

“Storytelling is a wonderful way of allowing children to experience meaningful human contact.”

Rachel Smillie

## Storytelling

### Rachel Smillie and Julie Dawid

The Village Storytelling Centre in Glasgow explored with delegates the positive educational benefits of creative approaches to storytelling. This includes primary class visits to the centre to hear traditional stories and participate in related activities; the ‘Story through Song’ project which is helping children to write and record songs based on stories; a computer-based project that saw young people writing their own plots, dialogues and characters into a

computer programme; and a project through which local people and asylum seekers, young and old, learn about each others’ personal tales of transition.

The workshop also introduced the technique ‘The Community of Enquiry’, a discussion process through which children are encouraged to think deeply, listen well and start to question and challenge. Delegates tried the technique themselves after being told a story and engaged in

in-depth discussion about the issues it raised.

Rachel Smillie, director of The Village Storytelling Centre, said: “Storytelling is a wonderful way of allowing children to experience meaningful human contact. The Village hopes to use this age-old human art to give children opportunities to question, think and feel in ways that are not prescribed by curriculum or management, but by the heart.”

## Self leadership and appreciative leadership

Joey Walters and John Dickson,  
Dancehammer Group Ltd

Educators are role models, and must be effective leaders. However, we can't be effective leaders without mastering 'self leadership', which is a powerful reflection of our principles and values.

Dancehammer, a consultancy that specialises in the growth of leadership, explored with delegates how they can lead using their "sense of self" rather than their "attachment to role". Joey Walters said: "Sometimes we become over-identified with our roles and the expectations and demands they place upon us. We 'become' the role and find it hard to detach our thoughts, feelings and responses from our perceptions of the role. We need to strengthen our 'self' identity to avoid losing our sense of personal purpose, vision and values that will provide the inspiration, confidence and energy for truly effective and authentic leadership."

"Sometimes we become over-identified  
with our roles and the expectations  
and demands they place upon us."

Joey Walters

Discussing Appreciative Leadership, John Dickson said: "It's really a way of inspiring the best from others by paying attention to and thinking about what is working for us, rather than becoming depleted by dwelling on what isn't. It takes self-awareness to notice when we dwell too much on the negatives of a situation. It also takes the practice of self-leadership to help us shift our focus and thinking to that which will create a more positive environment for change, one which is more uplifting for us and those we influence.

"For educators, this means staying focused on providing a loving and positive learning

environment in which children can grow. It's all too easy for teachers to become depleted with negative thoughts about the educational system. We feel the most important thing is how the educator is being with children. If they become overly identified with their professional role, they can lose much of their authenticity, wisdom and love. Children will be heavily influenced by the quality of relationship they experience with their educators."

For further information visit  
[www.dancehammer.co.uk](http://www.dancehammer.co.uk)

For me the most wonderful thing to take from the conference was to witness so much soul energy manifesting, so much eye-to-eye contact that offers a belief in self and the person you talk to, sharing in a realm I have never witnessed in the context of education. The energy and the desire for so many people to believe and manifest such positive change in quite a demoralising environment was phenomenal.

One week later I was driving past Motherwell. Five years ago I was on a final teaching practice in a school there with the most amazing teacher. 52 years old, with one of those difficult classes only in nightmares and how Ann coped was an inspiration, and how she supported me as I endeavoured to cope with delivering the curriculum was equally impressive. I had ten minutes to spare so did a quick detour off the M74 and dropped in to say hello and offer thanks to Ann for that inspiration. It was a true heart inspired moment and a lovely brief connection again after five years. Being present at the conference created the space to follow my heart and offer my thanks.

Six months on and I'm preparing myself for the first formal meeting of parents from the local community with an interest in supporting the creation of a full-time outdoor nursery here in Fife, The Secret Garden. I am unsure of exactly what I can expect or even ask from them. I open the post of the day and out comes a postcard of HH Dalai Lama, on the reverse side a message to myself written as the conference ended 'I am not alone'. One of those synchronicity tingly moments occurs! I take this as a timely reminder of the strength gained from the conference to step on the edge and take the chance to fly with my vision, but holding dearly the need to include others, drawing them in to be part of something so much greater together.

*Cathy Bache, nursery school teacher, The Secret Garden*

*"the energy and the desire to manifest such positive change was phenomenal"*

The Positive Education Conference was clearly an oasis in the lives of those educational practitioners present, who described the event as 'enabling them to rediscover their original vocation within the teaching profession'.

*Norman Drummond*

The conference was a truly exceptional experience for me. I met many people deeply concerned about the failings and limitations of our education system. People spoke from their heart about what they see as needed.

I had not realised how powerful and multi-faceted Positive Education is as a focus for change. It holds the potential to lift education from the ordinary to the extraordinary. I know I will look back on the time I spent at this conference with great affection. Something of deep significance was birthed there. It now needs to be nurtured and cultivated. We all need to play our part.

*Ann Roberts, Dancehammer*

*"I had not realised how powerful and multi-faceted  
Positive Education is as a focus for change."*

At one point while Neil was addressing the audience I decided to turn around and take a peek at the other listeners. Used to talking to groups of children and adults with blank expressions on their faces, I was amazed to see a whole room of beaming faces and sparkly eyes, really listening. People who you know are doing good work from the heart and would be going back after the conference and continuing to inspire adults and children alike.

This enthusiasm and sincerity really stood out in the workshop I conducted about using storytelling and the Community of Enquiry discussion method - never have I worked with groups so keen, open and listening - as well as ready to challenge. Most unlike the reception I've had at in-services and staff meetings. It was a privilege to be there and share some of my limited knowledge with such keen learners and livers; such positive people.

*Julie Dawid, The Village Storytelling Centre*

*"This is the best  
course I have  
ever been on"*

The conference was completely amazing – I have still not stopped telling people about it.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to come together with so many great people – I have never before experienced such a very strong sense of positive good feeling in any one place – and over two days.

*Mary Scott, headteacher*

This was a brilliant experience and I have had a very positive day! This is the best conference/course I have ever been on and I have been on lots in the past 13 years! It was inspiring and the dance hammer sessions were extremely helpful and meaningful.

*Gillian Pryce, Teacher*

The Positive Education Conference of 18/19 Nov 2005, gave for me a glimmer of hope that we may at last be on the cusp of change in Scotland's schools. Was it because the guest speaker of the conference was His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, and therefore the delegate attracted to this event is also one who is attracted to the consistent messages given during the conference: the importance of relationships, seeing only the goodness in every child, or of living and working with love and compassion as was the message of the Dalai Lama?

Whatever the reason, classroom-based educators at last seemed ready to consider how we are all leaders in that we are in positions to influence and therefore shape the thoughts, attitudes and lives of others, as well as of ourselves.

Was it the start of a recognition that our responsibility as educators lies primarily with how we are as people and with each other, rather than with tests and league tables?

This was the hope I left with, as one delegate smiled to me as I stepped into the taxi and said 'I'm remembering what you said – "Be the sample and example".'

*Donia Keith, Living Values Education*

Some conferences in education seem “routine” and while interesting they make little impact. Others, once in a while, come along and they are significant. The Positive Education Conference held in Edinburgh undoubtedly falls into the latter category. Its significance arises from its participants, the climate created, and the subject matter.

The idea that education can be consistently ‘positive’ – basing its relationships on all that is good and being intolerant of negative comments or other forms of negativity, is a very significant idea. In his talk the Dalai Lama indicated that people should try to do good for and by others; and if they could not do good at least they should do no harm. It sounds simple, and even simplistic. Yet it has a depth that is also profound if carried through in practice. The participants in this conference were given a model of that, with the planning of Joey Walters and her colleagues, and the facilitation of Neil Hawkes. They set a context of powerful calm and energetic peace. That carried the conference in a truly inspirational way. The variety of experience, the pace of stimulation and times of peace, with significant times to talk with others led to a conference of deep meaning and opportunity for personal reflection.

As a speaker it was a privilege to be part of something that was bigger and deeper than “giving a talk.” It was searching for meaning as part of a community passionate about educating others. It was looking for that education to serve humanity. That was what the conference was really about.... and that is ‘Positive Education’.

**Bart McGettrick**  
**Former Dean of Faculty of Education, Glasgow University**

## Organisers and supporting organisations

**This conference was organised by the Edinburgh Inter-Faith Association with management support from Children in Scotland.**

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World Peace Prayer Society

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