



Successes And Struggles Of A Values Education Organisation

Collected newsletters of the National Association of Values in Education and Training (NAVET) 1989 – 1996
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Introduction

Why this collection of newsletters?

It will take a short story to explain why effort and expense is being put into publishing a collection of the newsletters of the National Association of Values in Education (NAVET).

The formation of NAVET was the realisation of a dream of two wonderful, caring men - Neville Stewart, headteacher of Deeside Community High School in Clwyd, Wales and Roger Harris, headteacher of Woodbrook Vale High School, Leicester.

Both these men knew that to reach their full potential in life, children (and adults for that matter) have to act according to universal human values. Neville and Roger glimpsed the synergy that could result if the various organisations and interested parties in values education could be brought together. And that's what they set out to do.

The minutes of the Steering Committee meetings in those early days in 1988 makes fascinating reading. In addition to Neville and Roger, Keith Poyser, Nikki Sims, Richard Till, Roy Wake and Veronica Williams were active in formulating the beginnings of what the new organisation would stand for and what it would attempt to achieve. As support grew, Carol Ulanowsky, Will Adams, Monica Taylor, Alan Powell, Chris Cotton, Sylvia West, Bertie Everard, John Brackenbury, Anita Compton, Joan Gregory, Howard Kennedy, Valerie Stephens, and Henry Tomlinson came on board.

It is due to the efforts of these long-serving educators that NAVET was formed and the work of promoting values education in a systematic and strategic way began. The article by Paul Harrison *Time to consider* in the Preamble after this introduction gives an excellent insight into the thinking of NAVET's Founders. I am grateful to the Times Educational Supplement for permission to republish that article.

NAVET made excellent progress in its early years. Various members gave talks to schools, colleges, government agencies and charitable funding bodies, for example. An annual conference was held and a small journal (NAVET Papers) and a newsletter (NEWSVALUES) were published regularly. I was honoured to be elected the Chair of NAVET in December 1993.

Despite NAVET's promising birth, membership peaked at 178 in December 1991. However, we always seemed to struggle to get colleagues to participate more fully in the administration of the Association. Just as in any organisation, there were the stalwarts who wrote articles, organised conferences and edited the publications. This is not a criticism – just a statement of how it is with much of modern life. People can see the worth of an enterprise and are prepared to pay a subscription fee.

However, many people have considerable and necessary professional and family commitments and it is difficult to justify spending time on additional voluntary tasks.

The office bearers often wondered if we were doing enough to promote NAVET, to make it exciting enough and to show the importance of the roles of values education in helping to overcome many social problems. The minutes show how much effort was put

into gaining more members and conference participants. We advertised for a part time Administrator/Conference Organiser who would be paid from the proceeds of subscriptions, conference fees and grant income. Unfortunately, after extensive promotion we had no takers.

While membership of NAVET remained steady at around 80, we struggled to get new office bearers. After three years in post, the existing office bearers did not wish to be re-elected. Consequently, at the AGM in 1995 it was decided to make a concerted effort to find new office bearers. If no new proposals were forthcoming, this would be an unfortunate sign that NAVET was not viable and that it should be wound up.

In preparing for the 1996 AGM it was clear that there would be no nominations for office bearers. Consequently, the motion to dissolve was put and members were given the chance to vote by post or in person at the AGM. The motion was carried and NAVET was officially dissolved on 30th April 1997.

Of course, there was considerable sadness on winding up. Sadness because a dream and a potential for so much good had not been fulfilled. However, one must look to the positive side. Much was learned by all those who did participate. We realised just what a complex phenomenon values education is. In addition, we learned that to communicate what values education is would take some doing! Sharing experiences with such dedicated fellow-educationists was thrilling.

And this leads us to why the Winding up Committee decided to allow publication of all the nineteen issues of the NAVET newsletter. In each newsletter are gems of information about values education, people's thoughts on what it should be and the struggles to promote it. This wealth of information and experience should not be lost and it was felt we should publish it. The information in this volume will hopefully help other educators and researchers in their values education work. It will also be of historical interest to see how the founders of the values education movement in the United Kingdom were thinking.

It is a privilege for CAVE to publish these collected newsletters. It was agreed that the newsletters would be published in the original. Consequently, the quality of copying of some is not as good as we all would like. This is because some were on coloured paper.

I hope you will get much pleasure from the 60 short articles, 24 book reviews and 10 letters. In addition, you should also find something to help further your own work in values education.

Bill Robb
Director CAVE

Preamble

Time to Consider

Paul Harrison investigates a new organization created to examine and question the unspoken values which underpin school practice

During discussions with a secretary of state, former chief HMI Sheila Drowne once asked: "Would you care to display your assumptions?" Getting people to display their assumptions - and debate them - will be one of the functions of the National Association for Values in Education and Training (NAVET), a new organization due to be launched at an inaugural conference in June.

NAVET is the brainchild of Neville Stewart, headteacher of Deeside Community High School, Clwyd, and seconded to serve as a director of the Centre for the Study of Comprehensive Schools. He says: "The idea developed over a long period. I was becoming increasingly concerned with values both in management and the curriculum and I was meeting a variety of other people - from industry and education as well as academic philosophers - who had similar concerns."

One of the people he met was Roger Harris, headteacher of Woodbrook Vale High School, Leicester, who for several years had been interested in values - in particular, the values that underpin the curriculum and organization of secondary schools.

They both saw a need to bring the various interests in values together under one umbrella and between them they organized two low-key conferences. The responses convinced them of the viability of a central organization concerned with values in education and training and a steering committee was formed.

Values in training was included, "Because," says Neville Stewart, "we saw a large gap at the interface between education and the world of work. It is a gap that has existed for a long time, but the increasing partnership between education and industry has made it much more explicit."

With the Christian Right continually taking the moral high ground you could be forgiven for automatically associating an organization concerned with values in education with the Baroness Cox, Mary Whitehouse or an organization like Campaign for Real Education which wants a return to what they call "traditional values and beliefs". But you would be wrong. As you would be wrong to associate it with the left. Or the middle.

NAVET is not about taking particular stances. It is a forum for examining and debating all values. Roger Harris stresses: "The most important thing I can say about NAVET is that it is concerned with valuing rather than with representing a particular set of values."

Neville Stuart illuminates: "It is process we are interested in. For instance, if we were to discuss co-operation and competition in schools NAVET would be for the dialogue and not for pushing one point of view or the other."

They are keen to get a very broad membership including religious and non-religious faiths, "So that instead of shouting at each other from the left and the right, we meet to get a better understanding."

So wary is the steering committee about being perceived as taking any particular value stance one member was worried about my using the term "neutral"; "That is a value position in itself," she said.

The declared aims of NAVET are to:

- Improve the quality of organizations by fostering the development of value-conscious individuals and value-effective programmes.
- Develop understanding and communication of the nature of values and their application within education and training.
- Encourage the recognition of the diversity of values and opinions within society and individuals.
- Enhance awareness of the powerful influence of value systems upon the climate of organizations by providing opportunities to challenge, discuss and reflect upon values, especially in areas where conflict arises.
- Increase the ability of teachers and trainers to deal sensitively and critically with value issues that arise from attempts to understand themselves in relation to others and the environment.

But what has all this rarified rhetoric got to do with the nitty-gritty of education you might ask. Roger Harris sees the examination of values as having direct relevance to the ways schools are run. "We often do things within education - and undoubtedly outside - because of the way we've done things before. Too often, last year's timetable and syllabus dictate how secondary schools are run." Ideas tended to get tacked on to existing monolithic structures without any questioning of the values that underpin that structure.

"The interactions between teachers and youngsters or parents may not be based on an agreed set of values. It would be naive to hope that you would get total agreement, but the process of actually exposing fundamental beliefs - is loyalty more important than honesty for instance? Does a child tell the truth about a miscreant friend? - is an important exercise in itself."

Continuous examination of values is a fundamental part of Woodbrook Vale High's practice. Groups of staff - both teaching and non-teaching - engage in discussion, case study and role-play to expose the different value systems operating within a school.

"It has become evident to us that problems of relationship at school rest on unexposed differences in the value-positions of the people involved. We all continually assume that those around us agree with our values including of course the youngsters in our care," says Roger Harris.

"The racist remark by an 11-year-old girl reflected her loyalty to the beliefs of her parents. The sullen defiance of a 12-year-old boy sprung from his perception of unfairness in his treatment by a member of staff."

Too often, he says, we talk about the content of the syllabus - and isn't that what we have become preoccupied with in education? - without asking the fundamental questions about why the children are in school anyway; what is the purpose of education?

Steering committee member Veronica Williams who is director of a Department of Education and Science sponsored project looking at religious education and values in secondary schools, sees an organization like NAVET as having direct relevance to contemporary issues: "The multicultural nature of society for instance means that people's values are actually being challenged." The Salman Rushdie affair was a good example.

"Certain political acts have also raised people's awareness of the things they hold dear - particularly with the new Education Act." In the run-up to the national curriculum Veronica sees evidence of great uncertainty by teachers of the arts about their worth. She thinks there is a great need for teachers to reassess where their particular subject areas fit into the whole pattern of things and to become newly aware of their worth and value.

"Practitioners in education tend to be unsure about the whole area of values and there needs to be a professional organization where a whole variety of positions can be put, educational questions can be raised, and values issues can be discussed. Values are emotionally charged. NAVET will provide an opportunity to deal with them in a professional detached way," she says. "I think it's really needed, but it will have a very difficult role acting as a sort of mediator between all the forces in education."

NAVET is attracting people from all areas of education and training - including teachers, philosophers, industrialists, humanists and those of religious faiths - and applications to join are pouring in.

Speaking at the association's inaugural conference will be Brenda Almond, reader in philosophy in education at the University of Hull and editor of the *Journal of Applied Philosophy* and Professor Tim Brighouse of Keele University, formerly chief education officer for Oxfordshire. Roy Wake, teaching fellow at the University of Southampton and educational adviser to NATO will talk on values and the curriculum with particular reference to history; and Bertie Everard, visiting fellow at London University, consultant to the DES and the DHSS, formerly management consultant with ICI, will talk on values, beliefs, education and training.

Neville Stewart is determined NAVET will be an organization of action: "We don't just want to be a talking shop. Some of the action under consideration is the formation of regional groups, research - including research into education/industry values, curriculum projects, a regular newsletter."

Affiliation with organizations working in related and parallel fields - like the Social Morality Council, the Association for Industry/Education Co-operation or the Higher Education Foundation - may be considered.

But the way NAVET goes will depend on the members. Says Roger Harris: "We haven't made any firm plans beyond the inaugural conference because we want to be influenced in our development by the membership."

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