

NEWSLETTER 56 - SPRING 2024

Critically important Early Years foundations

From birth to the age of five, children develop life-defining physical, cognitive and social-emotional skills. They are key to their achievements during their school careers, with long-term effects that shape their adult lives as well.

These early years are now considered the most important phase of a child’s education. However, historically, they have not been particularly well supported. This is changing.



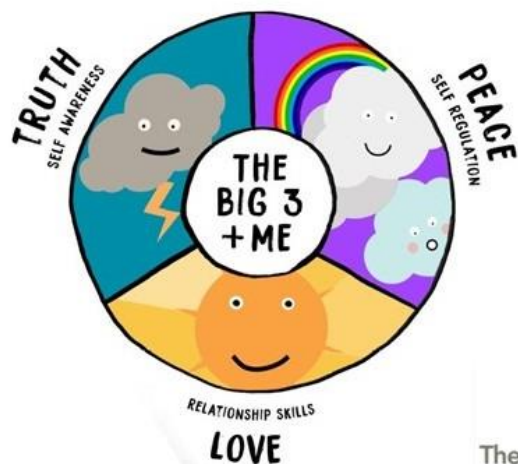
As part of its Covid-19 recovery drive, the Department for Education (DfE) is supporting initiatives that invest in the professional learning of the Early Years workforce. We have benefitted from this and are already contributing to the advancement of teaching and education outcomes for this age group.

Early in 2023, the DfE’s research partner, the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF), awarded us a grant to develop a programme that would better prepare children aged 3 to 5 for their formal schooling from the age of five. Great emphasis was placed on us also providing training to ensure Early Years leaders and practitioners have the skills needed to deliver effectively, high-quality Personal, Social and Emotional Development (PSED).

Our new, Early Years programme THE BIG 3 + ME is already making big differences

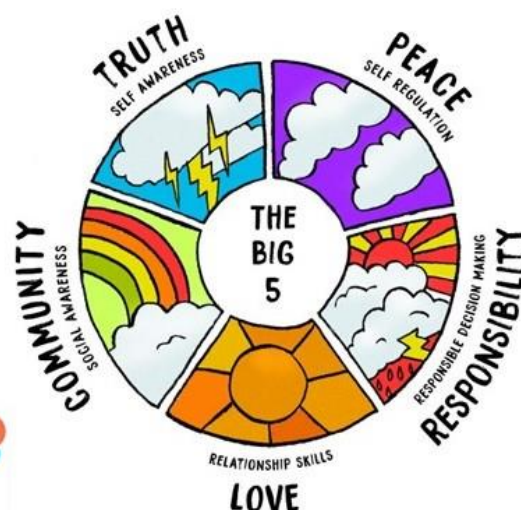
Ofsted inspections of primary schools with nursery and reception classes include an assessment of ‘**Early Years provision**’. What is so gratifying for us is that Brimsdown Primary School, which was one of the pilots last Autumn term for **our new programme, THE BIG 3 + ME**, achieved **Outstanding** in this category when inspected in December 2023. They have a banner outside their school proudly celebrating this. The report states that, **“Pupils develop strong habits for learning from the very start of their time in school”**, which was exactly our intention as we designed the 24 learning modules, along with evidence-informed training for the settings leaders and their early years staff.

THE BIG THINK – continuous life skills development for ages 3 to 11



THE BIG 3 + ME

Personal, Social and Emotional
Development (PSED)
programme for ages 3 to 5



THE BIG 5

Personal, Social and Health
Education (PSHE)
programme for ages 5 to 11

Ever since the Human Values Foundation was established in August 1995, we have been committed to supporting schools with innovative, experiential learning, whole-child programmes and training that help to improve academic performance while promoting a values and wellbeing pedagogy.

Today, our pair of programmes in The Big Think suite are underpinned by findings from robust research about relevant, modern education and what positively impacts all the important education measures. They provide a means to good, sustainable physical and mental health and life-enriching relationships for both children and facilitators. THE BIG 3 + ME curriculum is aligned to early years goals while THE BIG 5 builds on this foundation. Its set of 60 learning modules for ages 5 to 7 and a further 60 for ages 7 to 11 provides a practical route map to fulfilling the statutory expectations for comprehensive Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) provision, embracing Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE).

Experts consider and Ofsted inspectors have commented that **teaching is most effective and learning is most successful when the growth of the whole child – social, emotional, moral, spiritual and intellectual, is the pedagogical target.**

Our values-led approach prepares very young children so that they can thrive and are well equipped and eager to learn when they start their primary schooling from the age of five. Thereafter, with THE BIG 5, they progressively develop their individual characters, interests and abilities. Armed with a toolkit of essential life skills, they continue to grow into well-balanced young citizens, ready for the next stage of their education.

The human touch and Artificial Intelligence (AI)

Undoubtedly AI has the potential to transform traditional educational practices and create more inclusive learning opportunities that will benefit families, communities and society generally.

As human beings, our interactions and collaboration with living things provide special experiences that boost our wellbeing. When we created the introductory life skills in our pre-school programme, we arranged them under the core values of Peace, Truth and Love, and associated desired qualities with three engaging cuddly toys: a panda, a turtle and a puppy.



Each session starts with greeting the three animals and passing them around the circle. This promotes coming together, being patient and waiting your turn. Next, sitting down in the circle, the children enjoy a few moments of stillness with a visualisation set to gentle music. To the surprise of the staff who trialled THE BIG 3 + ME, their pupils with learning difficulties joined in too. All children seem to relish these tranquil times and the opportunity to settle down.

The resources include a pack of 69 feelings cards, as well as images that convey one's moods, such as sunny, happy, grumpy, frosty or carefree. Each session introduces three emotions, one for each of the animals. This helps with identifying, naming and being able to express feelings. They are all demonstrated with British Sign Language clips. The children love learning in this way, using their faces and hands to convey how they feel.

The eight **Peace** modules develop **self-regulation** so that gradually the children can use techniques and have a vocabulary to manage their emotions and stressful situations. The practical activities promote self-discipline, setting personal and collective goals and encourage curiosity as well as bravely stepping outside of comfort zones to embrace new experiences. Additionally, they emphasise the importance of seeking help when needed and being supportive of classmates.

The eight **Truth** modules nurture **self-awareness**. The children begin to learn about and think for themselves. They recognise sensations in their bodies as they feel frustrated, upset, excited, happy, etc. They consider honesty and trust. They take others' viewpoints on board. They want to show they can do things by themselves. They refer to the animals to reinforce their own feelings and sometimes, quite naturally, to comfort and support their companions.

The eight **Love** modules foster **relationship skills**. Whatever form AI takes in the future, being a caring person will be of paramount importance. In these sessions, children learn to communicate effectively and to build positive relationships. Activities provide opportunities for teamwork, collaboration, problem-solving, resolving conflicts constructively and resisting negative social pressure so they can stick to what they feel is the right thing to do. They can lead situations, seek help when they feel they need it and stand up for each other if necessary.

For many children now aged 3 to 5, restricted social and educational opportunities during the Covid-19 crisis means they have deficient communication, language, social and emotional skills. This is hampering their capacity to learn. In 2022, the Education Endowment Foundation reported that by the end of their first year of formal school in Reception classes, in 2021 only 59% of children were reaching the expected levels of development in core skills, down from 72% in 2019. We are working to turn this dire situation around.

The value of Community Values dialogues

A feature of THE BIG 5 programme is how shared values can unite school communities. A training session brings together about 30 representatives, including staff, children, parents, carers and local faith leaders. These sessions have proved to be particularly constructive for the mandatory consultation with parents about the content of Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) lessons.

We will shortly be extending our work with the School Improvement Officer for Islington Borough Council. In the past, we have led primary school community dialogues with the theme of Respectful Relationships. In line with contemporary topics and laws, the next ones will be focused on Belonging, Equality, Diversity and Inclusion.

The drop in the birth rate means that several primary schools in this borough are facing closure or amalgamation in 2025. We have been invited to conduct a series of Community Dialogues in 2024 giving school staff, children and caregivers the opportunity to air issues. The theme will be 'Change using Non-violent Communication Techniques'.

Supporting the HVF

Our grateful thanks to the trustees of The Joan Ainslie Charitable Trust for a grant that will make it feasible for some primary schools in socio-economically deprived parts of Kent, East Sussex and West Sussex to benefit from THE BIG 3 + ME programme and training, and to the trustees of The Fowler Smith and Jones Trust for enabling a similar Early Years Enrichment project in Essex. We are also immensely appreciative of all who wish to remain anonymous and those who have so generously made donations and subscribed as Members and Friends since our last newsletter, including Brenda and Norman Clark, John de Burgh Miller, Carol Hellyer, Adrian Price, Mike Roberts, Geoffrey and Ann Steinberg and Maureen Watson.

It's no exaggeration to say that without your support, thousands of children would not now be benefitting from learning to think for themselves, establish high, values-based standards and be gaining a toolkit of skills for coping well with the daily challenges, opportunities and social pressures they face. Your kindness is being translated into caring citizenship.

AND FINALLY ...

We always value your comments, suggestions and ideas about how we might win sponsorship for our various ongoing endeavours. Feel free to ask for information about The Big 5 and The Big 3 + ME programmes and share it with your family members, friends, colleagues, potential subscribing Friends of our charity and others. Do contact:

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Alternatively, ring 01403 259711 or e-mail: yes2values@hvf.org.uk.

The charity's website is: www.humanvaluesfoundation.com.

The Big Think's website is: www.the-big-think.org.

The HVF team wishes our readers a happy, healthy and uplifting summer.

Patrons: Sir Michael Morpurgo, OBE, FRSL, FKC, DL;
Prof Kamran Mofid, PhD; Dr Kevin Auton, PhD

Education Advisor: Sir Anthony Seldon, MA, PhD, FRSA, MBA, FRHistS, FKC

