

Are self-transcendence values promoted?



Why values?

Values represent our guiding principles; our broadest motivations, influencing the attitudes we hold and how we act (Holmes *et al* 2011). It is therefore essential that we recognise the importance of values in our work as educators; and that we are very mindful about which values we wish to support and develop through our work.

Values as a social science concept are central in explaining social and personal organisation and change, and in explaining the motivational basis for attitudes and behaviours (Schwartz 2012). As such the understanding of values and how values for sustainability can be supported through outdoor learning is key to supporting a positive shift toward attitudes and behaviours that are in-line with sustainable thinking and action.

To help define and understand values further Schwartz (1999), a leading researcher in the field of universal values, offers six clear insights into the nature of values:

- 1) Values are beliefs linked inextricably to affect.
- 2) Values refer to desirable goals that motivate action.
- 3) Values transcend specific actions and situations.
- 4) Values serve as standards or criteria, but are rarely deployed as such consciously in our everyday decision making.
- 5) Values are ordered by importance relative to one another.
- 6) The relative importance of multiple values guides action.

These insights should help clarify the following discussion of values and their importance in outdoor learning for sustainability.

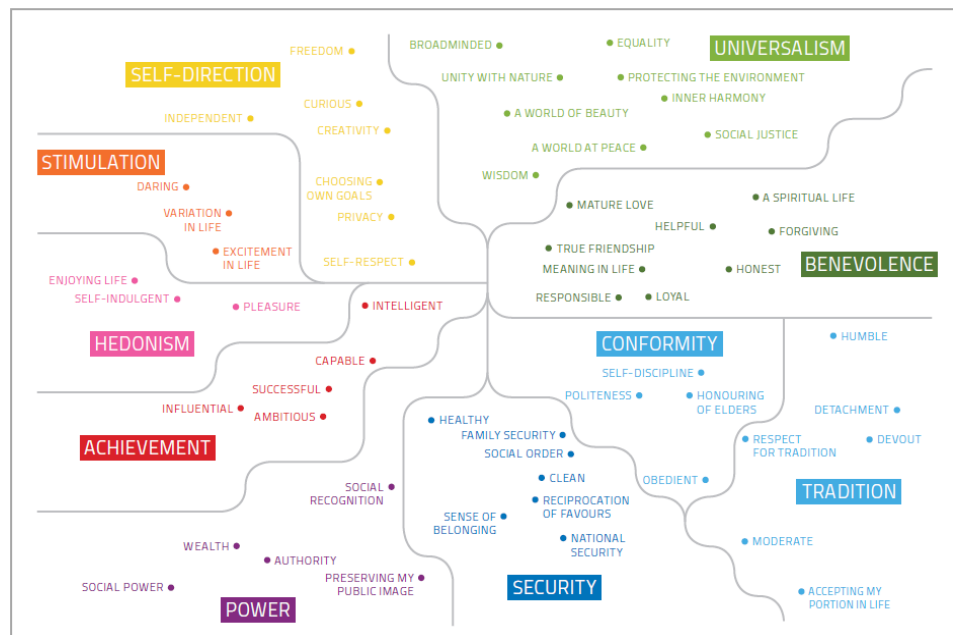
Values and the educator

As facilitators of outdoor learning we must keep in mind the values we are promoting through the activities we deliver, how we conduct ourselves and the settings we use. The world around us is full of values, and we cannot ignore and push aside those values that may be viewed as 'unsustainable'. We all hold all of the values outlined in the research below, it is just that they are held in different regard by different individuals and at different moments in time.

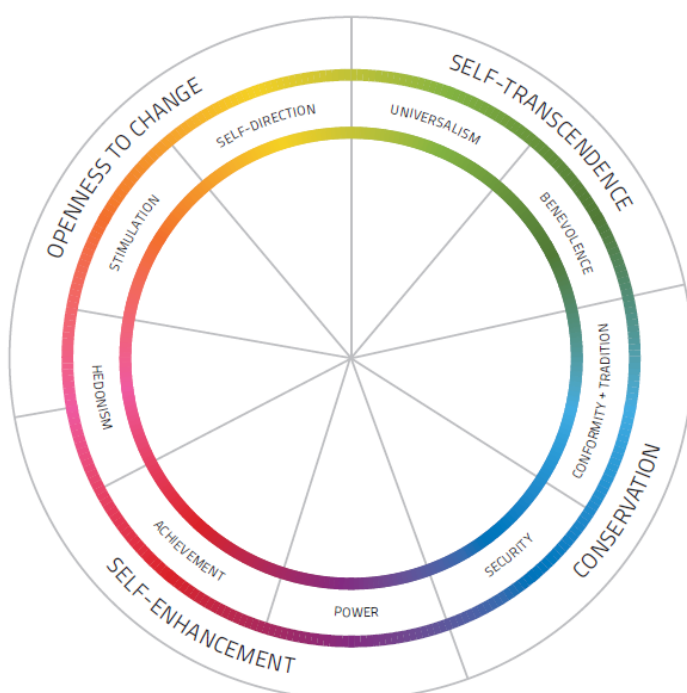
How values work

Due to their intangible nature it can be very useful to use well researched structures to help understand values. Resulting from decades of international research and cross-cultural studies 58 universally re-occurring value items have been identified that have then been arranged statistically into ten value groups (see Figure 1)(Holmes *et al* 2011).

Figure 1. A statistical spatial analysis of value structure across 68 countries, [Common Cause Handbook](#), page13.



It was found that these value groups can be arranged in a circle to help understand their relationship to one another (see Figure 2) (Schwartz 1992).



Of greatest interest in terms of sustainability are the self-transcendence values (top right in Fig. 2), as these align with bigger-than-self thinking and action (click [here](#) for more findings from RWL values workshops).

Figure 2. Value Circle, Common Cause Handbook, page 16

The research has deduced some simple but important rules about how these values interact.

It has been found that if a certain value is triggered, this will also trigger adjacent values in the circle.

For example the triggering and strengthening of universalism will also trigger and strengthen benevolence and self-direction values (also key values for sustainability). This is referred to as the spill over-effect. This can be seen to work on both the values group level (as shown in Figure 3a) and on the individual value level (as shown in Figure 3b).

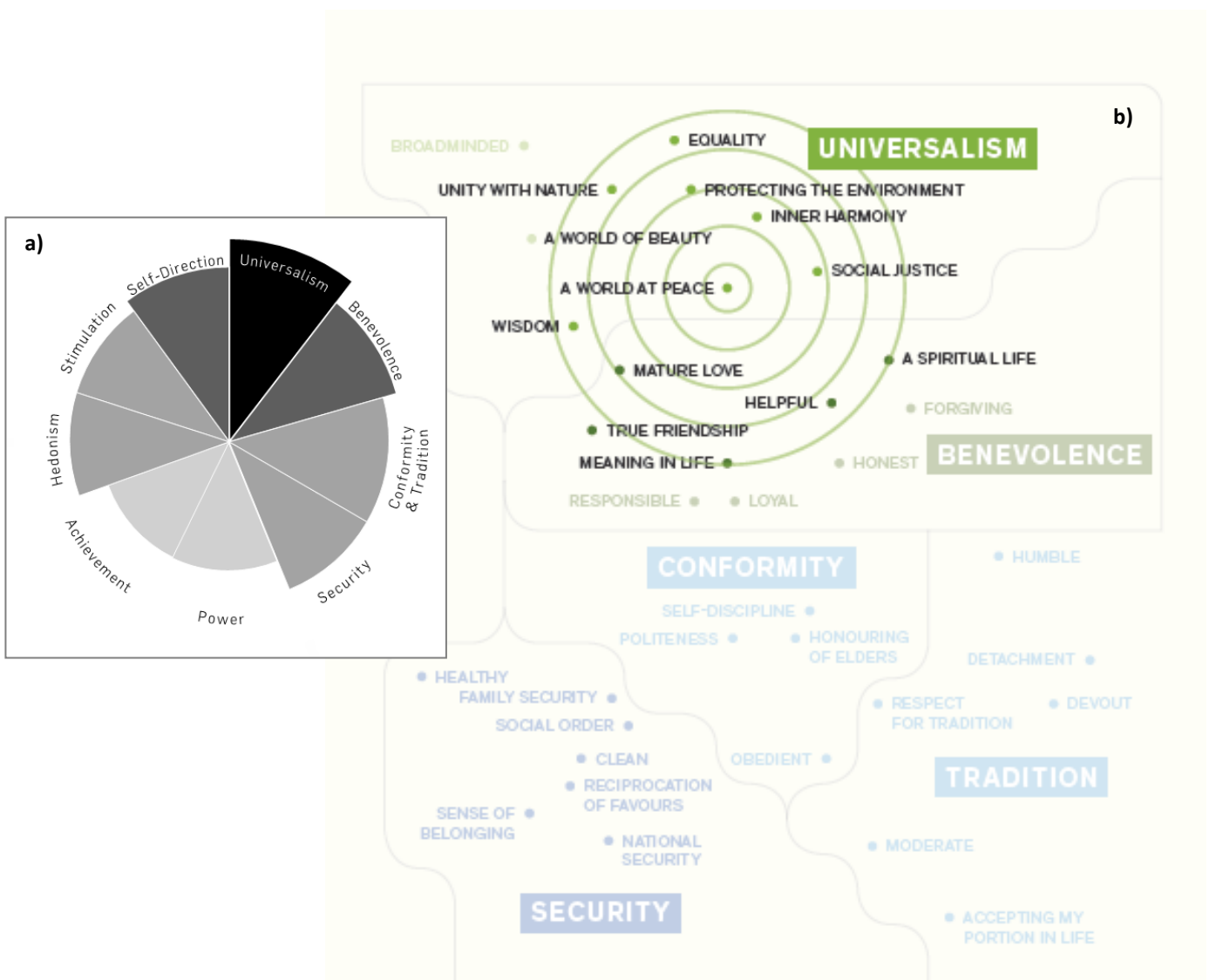


Figure 3a and 3b. Spill over effect. By engaging one value, we can also engage other adjacent values or groups of values.

On the other hand, it has been shown that when certain values are held in high regard, or when they are triggered, those on the opposite side of the circle will be held in much lower regards, or will be suppressed. For example those holding achievement in high regard will have a much lower regard for benevolence. Therefore, to strengthen achievement and power means to weaken universalism and benevolence. This is referred to as the see-saw effect (see Figure 4) (Holmes *et al* 2011).



Figure 4. The see-saw effect.

When self-transcendence values are engaged research has shown that self-enhancement values are likely suppressed. For example a powerful outdoor experience that strongly engages *unity with nature* will suppress values such as *social recognition*. If this sort of experience is repeated, then this pattern will be strengthened.

If, as happens on a daily basis through the media, self-enhancement values such as *wealth* or *social power* are engaged then research has shown self-transcendence values such as *social justice* and *protecting the environment* are likely suppressed.

In both these senses self-transcendence and self-enhancement values are like connected balloons - as one expands, the other contracts.

Mixing values messages through our work will at best have a neutral result, however more likely (as shown by research) cause mental discomfort for the learners.

Blackmore *et al* 2013, Common Cause for Nature report.

The theory behind how values are strengthened is fairly intuitive, but none-the-less essential to recognise. Over time the repeated engagement of certain values will strengthen them (Hüther 2006), therefore outdoor learning offers an important opportunity as part of any learners lived experience to strengthen self-transcendence and self-direction values.

Values infuse the world around us

It is important to note that all situations, not just the learning activity itself, are infused with values. Therefore the learning environment, behaviour and attitudes modelled by the facilitator and the approach to learning all play a key role in values development. For example if the learning is approached in an open manner that is accepting of different viewpoints, where learners are treated as equals and independence is encouraged then self-transcendence and self-direction values may be reinforced (Holmes *et al* 2011).

When considering the promotion of 'values for sustainability' in our work we should not make the assumption that self-enhancement is a 'natural' desire of humanity, for this has been shown to be untrue. For example it has been found that the UK public holds self-enhancement as a lower priority than in the public relations of some conservation NGO's (Blackmore *et al.* 2013:35,39), and neuroscience research confirms that young children are 'wired' much more for empathy than for competition (Tomasello 2009). We train ourselves to be competitors (Spitzer 2009).

Values in Real World Learning

If we can raise-up those values that promote sustainable ways of thinking and being through our work then we are on the right path. It is essential that we offer the learners a chance to live these values through the learning experience. It has been shown that values effect behaviour, and also that repeated behaviours effect values. Teaching values doesn't change values, living values leads to values changing and being reinforced. To help in this practice three core values have been suggested to focus our thinking:

Respect for nature and care for the state of our planet

This recognises the core universalism values that relate to nature, with the goal of preserving the natural environment (Schwartz *et al* 2012). This includes recognising and understanding our place as a part of nature (unity with nature), our role in thinking and acting with respect for the welfare of the natural environment (protect the environment) and appreciating the diversity and wonder of the natural world (world of beauty).

Equal opportunities for all people to shape their lives

This recognises broad societal concern, with the goal of commitment to equality, justice and protection of all people including the welfare of those directly around us. This encompasses areas of universalism (broadmindedness, wisdom, equality for all, social justice and a world at peace) and benevolence (honesty, helpfulness and forgiveness).

Respect for future generations

This recognises the need for our thinking and action in the present to be aligned with needs of future generations in terms of all living things. This connects with the need for respect

that arises from both universalism (protecting the environment and equality for all) and benevolence (helpful - working for the welfare of others) values.

If, as facilitators of outdoor learning, we can keep these values in mind - embodying and promoting them through our planning, delivery and evaluation – and offer learners the opportunity to live out these values, then we will be setting a strong foundation for learning for sustainability.

More information about values is available at the following links:

[Common Cause Handbook](#) – a guide to values for educators, politicians and everyone in between.

[An overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values](#) – an article overview for educators.

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