

Letters to the Editor

Educators must help 21st-century young people to live the virtues

From Mrs Christine de
Marcellus Vollmer

SIR - I would like to congratulate Mick Clarke for his work and for his article (Comment, August 19) calling for values education for the urban youth who has suffered such neglect.

Thirty years' work with all the social problems which arise from the lack of understanding of the logic of universal values has convinced us that the fundamental need in education is exactly that. What possible use can any other education be if the universal values of honesty, perseverance, courage, respect for the property of others, generosity, loyalty and so on cannot be properly applied to life?

The challenge of our century is to enable children who have little contact with their working parents, and who are bombarded with anti-values proposing every variety of egotism and destructive behaviour, to see their way clear to the happiness of self-respect and a sense of meaning. Twenty years ago we decided the only way was by building a really attractive curriculum for the 12 levels of schooling which would make these universal values easy to understand, to accept and to act upon. This curriculum is called *Alive to the World*. In Spanish the curriculum (known as *Aprendiendo a Querer*) has been very successful in schools of all socio-economic levels in

Latin America. Its success in reducing school violence in the most troubled shanty towns has been outstanding. Principals report a renewed leadership among teachers who enjoy the fact that the pupils want more hours of the curriculum.

The bishops' conference of Brazil has adopted it and just launched a Portuguese version, called *Caminhos de Vida*, in five states. The minister of education of the state of Sao Paulo has certified the curriculum and has high hopes for its application in the city's famous favelas.

The success of this programme is due to the fact it that is story-based and conceived anthropologically, rather than sociologically or religiously. Each level has its own textbook which follows the adventures of a group of friends, in school, at games and in their community. There are 35 chapters per year (one hour per week) and at each age the existential situations of that level of development are encountered by the characters and a range of attitudes and responses are explored in the story. This approach allows pupils to observe in the third person, think the situation through and share their reasoning as in former times they would have done through the extended family and a friendly community.

Alive to the World is not religious, but illustrates how to live the universal,

in fact Christian, values and virtues, to develop the unique personality of each and gives anthropologically correct male and female models.

Alive to the World is already available in an edition specifically edited for Britain. It has been pioneered successfully in several schools. In one school pupil behaviour noticeably improved within six months of its introduction. A four-minute film, with testimonials from the English experience, may be seen at the website Alivetotheworld.co.uk, where background detail and sample chapters of the books are also to be found. Our publishers are Gracewing.

I further invite you to look at our parent website, Allianceforfamily.org, which shows what we are achieving worldwide, and InfoVal.org, for interactive discussion on values and character education.

Catechists are finding that this grounding in the logic of virtues is fundamental in order for the mysteries of our Faith and Catholic morality to be properly understood by young Catholics.

Yours faithfully,
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By email

From Dr Mike Delarw