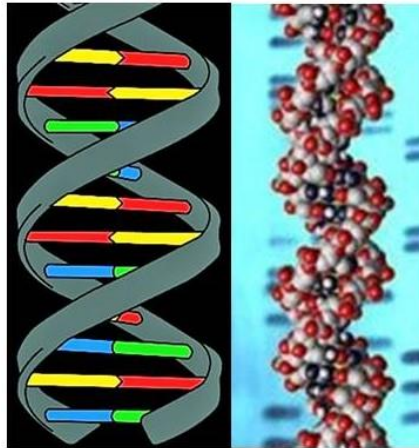




VALUES-THEMED ARTICLE: Autumn 2018

DNA and Values - Every Child has a Unique Profile



Whatever young people's educational journeys, as individuals they all have unique characteristics just like their fingerprints and DNA sequences. An exciting paradigm shift is taking place in education as approaches to teaching and learning become increasingly creative and student-centred enabling all learners to develop and blossom in their own, special ways.

Just as forensic investigators can identify an individual using DNA (Deoxyribonucleic Acid) to create a genetic profile - a set of numeric values that is exclusive to that person - so educators know the individuals, whom they are coaching and mentoring, by the acid test of their academic attainment and exam outcomes. However, looking at test scores is just one aspect of a child's personal and social DNA. There are several other enlightening elements of the learner's profile to take into account, such as each individual's disposition, passions, interests, talents and values. These may not shape league tables but teaching to this composite profile can better prepare learners for the modern world.

Education is on the move

As Albert Einstein said, *"The world as we have created it, is a process of our thinking. It cannot be changed without changing our thinking."*

[Sir Ken Robinson](#) is acutely aware of changes needed and the importance of motivation that is conducive to every single young citizen flourishing. As he says:

- *"Human resources are like natural resources; they're often buried deep. You have to go looking for them; they're not just lying around on the surface. You have to create the circumstances where they show themselves."*
- *"The fact is that given the challenges we face, education doesn't need to be reformed - it needs to be transformed. The key to this transformation is not to standardize education, but to personalize it, to build achievement on discovering the individual talents of each child, to put students in an environment where they want to learn and where they can naturally discover their true passions."*

Character development and values

For some time concern has been growing about whether the emerging generation of citizens' education is sufficiently fit for purpose especially bearing in mind the state of the health and wellbeing of so many young people, degradation of the environment, the world they are inheriting, the pace at which various aspects of daily life are evolving and the qualities needed for the new world of work.

In 2017, the Dame Kelly Holmes Trust held a series of round table discussions with a large cross section of people from politics, education and the youth sector in the UK to address the significance of character development, viewed as an important yet often overlooked part of education today. Along with the attendees, countless stakeholders involved in how children are growing up consider that young people need to be better equipped with tools and skills that enable them to live positive lives and that assisting them in developing strong character traits supports improved academic attainment, employment prospects, workplace productivity and individuals' contributions to society.

Following the nurturing of character initiative, in July 2018 a white paper was published: [The Opportunities and Challenges offered by Character Education](#). The first recommendation is that the Department for Education takes the lead in establishing a clear definition for character development and that it should then be applied across Government and communicated effectively to organisations in the education, business, community and youth sectors.

It is proposed that **character development** is defined as: *when people align their actions with their considered values.*

Values define who we are

Just as a DNA profile is extracted from a piece of evidence from the subject, so several aspects of someone's makeup can be discerned from personally chosen values. This is because our values help to identify what we hold dear, what we consider important, what motivates us and what we prioritise. Together with our beliefs, they are the causal factors that drive our thinking, decision-making and behaviour.

"Creativity is intelligence having fun"

Since character development is key to young citizens flourishing, maximising their potential and living healthy, fulfilling lives of meaning and purpose, what is important now is that time is invested in it as an integral part of each child's education.

Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development and Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education and Citizenship are stepping stones in the right direction but, fundamental to all this progress is quality, systematic values education. To provide clarity and properly reflect each young person's uniqueness, all learners need regular opportunities to explore and apply values so as to establish for themselves a foundation of ones that feel right and that will be their daily reference points, particularly as they navigate the plethora of challenges they currently face and that they will encounter as their lives and the future unfold.

Educators have the opportunity to creatively embed an awareness of values and their influences on all aspects of life, at home, in school and in wider contexts. In doing so, they will witness the delight shown by the children as they apply the empowering competencies being gained and draw on newly acquired capacities that express their uniqueness. The stimulating process excites curiosity and engenders a general improvement in wellbeing and an eagerness to learn. The exhilarating feeling of authenticity rises as the participants build up their confidence and learn to align their deliberations, choices and actions with their own, personally selected values.