



VALUES-THEMED ARTICLE: Autumn 2016

The Buzz Word is VALUES



[World Values Day](#) epitomises how people everywhere, including teachers, are passionate about doing something to make the world a better place. The conscious use of inspiring values is the transformative agent. As Aristotle said, "Educating the mind without educating the heart is no education at all." Educationalists, who want to help children and young people live their lives to the fullest, are prioritising their pupils' social, emotional, physical and spiritual wellbeing because they understand that learners' welfare underpins their personal development and academic and other achievements.

**"Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world."
- Nelson Mandela**

If education is to equip and empower young people so that they can flourish and develop the moral muscle needed to live informed, happy, fulfilling lives in our beautiful, dynamic, challenging world, then learners need a blending of academic instruction with the nurturing of life-enriching human qualities. Throughout the world, there is a growing awareness that creating the very best culture in schools for all staff, both teaching and non-teaching, is paramount and that explicit, holistic values education helps to create optimum conditions for learning.

Conscious of the deep need for education that is fit for purpose, there is a growing commitment in schools to put values at the epicentre of their leadership, management and teaching. As with all other entities, be they governments, businesses, schools or families, leaders in education recognise that people's values convey who they really are, what is important to them, what motivates them and what the causal factors are that drive and underlie their thinking, decision-making and actions.

Regular values education sessions within a school curriculum is appealing and inspiring for children and young people particularly because they begin to appreciate the relevance of so much of what they are learning. Since values pertain to all aspects of life, the subject opens up opportunities to discuss, in safe and enabling environments, dilemmas, concerns and some of the big questions about what is right and wrong so that young citizens can better grapple with the range of complex issues they as individuals and society generally face, in the short, medium and longer term.

The process is highly engaging, developing self-confidence and essential social and emotional life skills, all the while expanding learners' thinking and horizons so that they debate, reflect upon and become much more aware of who is affected by people's actions and inactions, what effects they have on themselves and others, how they impact society and the environment and so on.

"The secret of change is to focus all your energy, not on fighting the old but on building the new." - Socrates

People's mindsets are critical to change taking place and central to the outcomes are behaviour modifications. Teachers, who are passionate about raising standards and bringing out the very best in the entire school community, recognise that their schools are key places for shaping the health, happiness, wellbeing and life chances of their pupils. They acknowledge the pressing need to integrate character development into the school curriculum but they also know that the physical and social environments in which pupils constantly interact with others have a bearing on educational progress and that the school's culture has profound effects on everyone's attitudes, feelings and achievements.

There is a growing desire by both parents and teachers for more holistic education. While for many children, their families and friends provide them with the most inspiration, it is vital that schools ensure learners' welfare and educational excellence are central to their visions and work. Considerations about ethics and character are not the preserve of either parents or schools. Teachable moments constantly crop up in all contexts. What is important is that key adults' mutually compatible goals promote and foster young people's well-rounded, whole-person growth and values literacy. The resulting personal qualities engendered are conducive to the individuals making rapid academic progress and developing a moral identity that feels right for them.

"A diamond is a chunk of coal that did well under pressure." - Henry Kissinger

The relentless focus on test and exam results and positions in league tables means that many teachers feel under considerable pressure to the extent that some curricula are narrowed and the social, emotional, physical and spiritual aspects of children's development are being squeezed out of the school timetable.

However, as the embedding of carefully considered values becomes ever more central to the successful ways in which individuals, families, schools, businesses, governments and all other organisations operate, there is a growing recognition by more teachers not only of the potential of good, systematic values education and its role as a key element in improving learners' attainment levels and their preparation for life but also as a significant contributor to all staff engaging with their own values and in doing so, enhancing the quality and effectiveness of their teaching; establishing stronger, values-based leadership and staff development; enhancing student/teacher relationships; and engaging parents and carers in the shared responsibility for the youngsters' progress.

Just as values-based businesses are tending to attract talented staff, so are schools discovering the value of values education and its appeal to talented teachers.

As Albert Einstein said, "Creativity is intelligence having fun." What is increasingly happening around the world is that the system of education is becoming more fun and appealing. Education practitioners are looking critically at new, values-based initiatives and ideas in order to leverage the quality and effectiveness of teaching and learning and focus on what is important to their practices and student outcomes now and for future generations.