

Beyond Standardised Tests



What is Education?

The importance of education systems in assisting students to draw out their full potential requires more than standardised tests and league tables. Yes we need to improve our standards but we also need to make sure that we don't forget the real purpose of education.

The word education comes from its Latin derivative, 'educare', to draw out.

I wonder how testing students on acquired knowledge *draws out* their Human Potential, or Community Connections, or Family Relationships or prepares our students for Happiness and Success in their adult lives beyond the school yard.

Today there is a growing body of work that looks at the qualities necessary for happiness and success in the world. Having spent more than 30 years in the classroom, the boardroom and travelling this world I believe passionately

that the four key fundamental human qualities necessary today are:

- **FLEXIBILITY**
With a focus on lengthening our mental muscles or developing our capacity to bend-so that we become like a flexible tree that can bend in a high wind and rise again when the wind dies down
- **ADAPTABILITY**
An aspect of flexibility - coping and being resourceful, modifying our behaviour in different situations
- **CREATIVITY**
Seeing old things with fresh new eyes
- **INNOVATIVENESS**
Putting these things into practice to bring about change

By fostering these qualities in ourselves and explicitly teaching them to the children in our classrooms, we can begin preparing them for a successful adult life as a contributing member of society. Although contribution is not measured in exam results, degrees, which school they attended and how that school compared to the "like" schools in their state or country or the OECD, it is vital to success and happiness. As parents and educators our highest aspiration is that our children grow to be of high integrity as well as kind and caring members of society.

Maybe it is time to question our system. It is not that we are doing a bad job. But we might ask ourselves how we can do a better job. In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says (and I paraphrase) that *the biggest block or barrier to greatness is being good at what you do*. Let us not allow the numbing effect of being good at what we're doing keep us from awakening to our possible greatness.



In the light of this I put forth that it might be time to rethink our **Educational System**. We might review it through the lens of 'educare' asking ourselves how and to what extent our educational system draws out the latent gifts, talents and potential of our students. How and to what extent do we begin to incorporate the fundamental qualities that make for a happy functional person? How do we improve ourselves, the students we teach, the teams we work with, the profession we are part of, the schools we work in and the entire system.

Maybe we need to remind governments and bureaucrats that students are more than test results and that our goal should be to draw out the potential of every child in every classroom in every school. This necessitates thinking about the person as a whole, their intellectual, emotional, and social skills and interactions.

Moreover, maybe we need to think of this in terms of a new kind of literacy. If you look at the amount of bullying and cyber-bullying going on in our schools, you can easily understand my call for a change.

This is not to the exclusion of reading and writing, but rather reconceptualises and adds an additional aspect that includes **Emotional Literacy** and **Social Literacy** as critical components of a student's true development.

My premise is simple. Yet the work that lies before us is challenging and the change that is necessary is big.

The individual student is worth it, the individual teacher is worth it, the individual staff member is worth it, each principal is worth it, every school is important.

Ultimately all of this adds up to a better society, a society in which members of the community contribute their gifts and talents to the good of the whole.

*The outcomes, however,
are enormous and the
pursuit is worth it.*



A Human Values Model

My thinking transformed over the years I transitioned from the classroom to the boardroom and went onto coach executives. It became very clear that the boardroom was not occupied purely by the intellectually elite but instead, extremely successful men and women who had attained a balance in their intellectual, emotional and social qualities.

They had great control over their emotions and they had developed healthy relationships with their peers through authentic listening and communication skills. Naturally these people were intellectually bright, but they were more, they were **Emotionally Literate** and **Socially Literate**..

Social Literacy

Is about the quality of our social relationships. It is how we connect with and relate to others. It is about 'being smart' in your social relationships and nurturing those relationships over time.

Social Literacy includes such qualities as being helpful and caring. It includes being considerate of others and listening to their needs and feelings. Those who are socially literate get along well with others, work well in a team and collaborate easily with others on projects. Further, they do not need to claim the recognition but are glad to share the achievement and recognize others for their contribution. These people communicate well, listen with their hearts and minds open, and are empathetic without being enablers.

Emotional Literacy

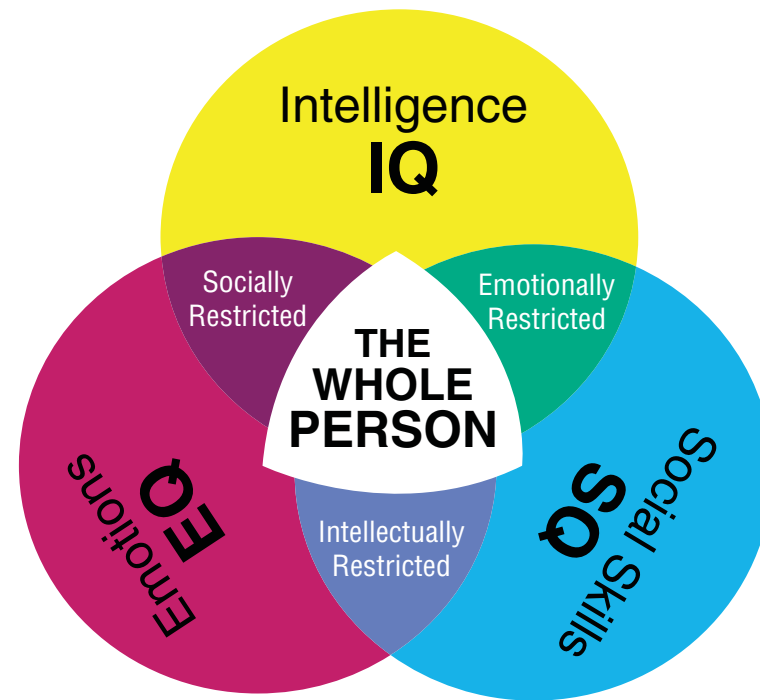
Is about how we react or respond to events and situations that unfold during our daily experience, at school, at home or in the work place.

Emotional literacy includes such things as psychological hardiness, resilient optimism and the ability to delay gratification for a long-term goal. It also includes the ability to remain calm under pressure and to be patient when faced with challenging situations and people.



The **Whole Person Learning Model™** that I developed is the result of decades of research and experience from the classrooms through to the boardrooms of some of our largest corporations. I saw the need to extract the individual qualities that combine to make a fully functioning happy and successful human being. I isolated the traits to make it easier to teach and develop these necessary skills for success and satisfaction as a human being.

It is not possible to teach a student how to **care** in isolation from **listening** or **respect** or without the relationship of these qualities to their peers or families. With this thought in mind the obvious occurs – recombine the human qualities for success and happiness back into an easily understood model that reflects the essential relationship between them.



The Comfort Zone

When explicitly teaching these skills in the classroom we must remember that change is confronting. While intellectual learning is often rapid, behavioural change takes time. This is because we are dealing with deeply imprinted behaviours and patterns. However, with an understanding of the Comfort Zone we can break the task into smaller steps and then scaffold the process to achieve the desired result.

When people try to change their habits they are faced with the very real possibility of failure. There is the possibility of embarrassment, ridicule, or even loss of peer status. The older we are the more prepared we are to deal with this fear. Younger people, however, have an acute sense of trepidation, nervousness and fear especially when it comes to opinions and attitudes of their peers. To achieve our goal we need to break that goal into smaller more achievable action steps.



This is the reason that we use the qualities and characteristics within each of the emotional and social domains from the whole person model.

By scaffolded small steps and repeating them until they become second nature, we can help students build a firm foundation based on the fundamentals. Then we can add one skill at a time to strengthen the whole human being. Finally, we can put the single small skills together to form a large shift. As the old habit is left behind, the new habit is formed and a new expanded comfort zone is established.



What is Values Education?

Some believe values education is something new, thought up in the past few years in response to Government statements. It is not, values have always been taught. In years gone by homes and churches were the locations where values were taught to children, today the K-12 school plays a larger part due to social changes over the decades

Having studied the human condition for three decades my inquiry has been around these three fundamental questions:

- **What does it mean to be a human being?**
- **What does it mean to express our true humanity?**
- **How can I, as one human being, live an ordinary life in an extraordinary way?**

I believe that any good Values Education curriculum must endeavour to address these questions. These are the fundamental qualities that define people and communities so these can't be ignored. Assess your current program in light of these questions and see if you can give students an opportunity to rigorously engage in the development of the qualities that might answer these questions.

Your chosen Values Education program should be easy to implement and flexible enough to fit your already busy school day. Ideally the program will have theory and practical examples to explicitly show students the real life application of these values. A scaffolded approach to the values is ideal.

Values are big things.

To be successful, any approach requires scaffolding so that students can experience success as the lessons unfold.

If we take a foundational approach then build upon each step over the years by reinforcing the results and learning to date, we stand a greater chance of making lasting changes in our students.



In closing

It is vital that we remember why we are Teachers.

Students are more than test results they are whole human beings.

Schools are more than the sum of their collective student test results they are communities. The school community includes the students, teachers, management, parents, neighbouring schools, past students, future students, local people and anyone that comes into contact with any of these people. Show me the test results to measure these characteristics.

In spite of what some may think, teaching is the oldest and most important profession on the planet. The educators and the education of our children determine the future of our culture and the world as a whole.



About the author

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*A woman of
vision and insight*

International author, consultant, trainer and educator has decades of experience in the area of curriculum writing and program development. As co-founder of Élan Enterprises, Trinidad developed and delivered organizational training programs for business leaders, not for profit companies and schools across the USA and internationally. The effect has been education for the entire community.

Having been a classroom teacher for many years Trinidad's love of children has never waned. The past decade has seen her attention return to the classrooms of the world. Her work is grounded on the belief that children hold the hope for future generations.

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