



Teenagers' heads are filled with Katie Price and exam results – what they need to learn is CHARACTER: A surprising message from one of Britain's most successful head teachers

Snowfall has caused the closure of many schools and if the poor weather continues, they will remain shut next week. But why do we educate our children in schools? I think we have lost sight of their purpose, and the cold snap gives us a chance to think afresh.

While at home, the children can catch up on the news on Jimmy Savile and his depravities, cyclist Lance Armstrong, who deceived the world with his drug-taking, and Katie Price, the good-time girl who last week married a man on the advice of a psychic. These and other 'characters' like them exert a huge influence on the nation. In truth, they are just paper-thin personalities. The rot set in with the publication of Dale Carnegie's 'How To Win Friends And Influence People' in 1936, which put superficial personality skills above deeper virtues. It opened the cult of the personality, where people are judged not by who they are but how they present themselves. We can trace good character traits back to the Greek philosopher Aristotle, who argued that society will flourish only when we develop the virtues of our young. Traditional values include courage, resilience, loyalty, honesty, kindness, respect, responsibility and self-control. To these we might add everyday qualities: politeness, punctuality, good manners. Studies show that these can be taught, and that they endure throughout life.

Families have a role to play, but so do schools. Last year, the University of Birmingham founded the Jubilee Centre to study the development of good character. The research shows conclusively that good character traits are better predictors of academic and economic success and happiness than raw IQ. In the US, a branch of schools called Knowledge Is Power Program (KIPP) focuses on developing character, with high success rates. Each child is given a 'character report card', designed to show their traits improving over time. Developing character requires teachers to emphasise positive virtues, and to model them. Self-control is learnt through exercises that reward endurance, such as long hikes. Assemblies must highlight good behaviour and students should be trusted and taught to distinguish right from wrong. Older pupils should be given real responsibilities. Kindness must be emphasised, and all students given chances to volunteer and serve others. But the Government cares only for improving academic standards, measured by the passing of exams.

Don't get me wrong, high standards are fundamental, and Education Secretary Michael Gove and Chief Inspector Sir Michael Wilshaw are changing the landscape of British schooling. But their vision is sadly incomplete. The obsession with exams has caused schools to narrow what they offer, because teachers know they are being judged on academic results alone. Just this week, we have heard that parents are raising children 'in captivity' because of paranoia about safety: rather than facing character-forming challenges, they are mollicoddled. Meanwhile, Baroness Meacher suggests changes to current drugs laws. As a headmaster who has seen pupils die from drugs, I believe we need to do far more to help our young have the character to say 'no'. We cannot leave it to families.

Does the Government really think employers and universities want people who can pass tests, but lack the ability to think creatively, or the discipline to contribute? Protests about the lack of character in school leavers are rising to a cacophony.

At my own school, Wellington College, our young must abide by five values which they themselves chose: courage, integrity, kindness, responsibility and respect. They are taught self-control and endurance; working in teams on the games-field and in the cadet force, learning to overcome their limitations and obeying instructions. Since we started teaching well-being five years ago, where pupils learn to develop resilience, exam performance has rocketed – from 65 per cent A and B grades at A-level to 93 per cent.

But it is not just independent schools. From Kings Langley School in Hertfordshire to the Science Academy in Bradford, the best state schools are concentrating on character, with startling success. King Solomon Academy in London, which has a strong uniform code, celebrates good manners and teaches each child to aspire, has been transformed in just a few years. Governments want to show that they have significantly bolstered results and league table performance. But society has a longer time-frame, and needs young people to become kind, law-abiding, creative citizens.

<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/debate/article-2265285/Teenagers-heads-filled-Katie-Price-exam-results--need-learn-CHARACTER-A-surprising-message-Britains-successful-headteachers.html>

Importance of failure: why Olympians and A-level students all need to fail

We all want our children to succeed, don't we? What many of us overlook, however, is that allowing them to fail is an important part of any future success. London 2012 saw Team GB achieving remarkable success, but among the medal winners were those who failed to live up to expectations (both theirs and ours).

Athletes, however, are more able to handle failure than the schoolchildren studying for exams in the high-pressure environment of compulsory education. This is perhaps in part due to the massive commitment world-class athletes need in order to stay at the top of their game, but is also down to the work carried out by sports psychologists, who played an important role in the success of British athletes. The difference is that top athletes are often as familiar with their mental states as they are with their physical capabilities. Note that I have no issue with the use of the oft-derided term 'fail', for without failure there would be no success, would there? Fail is not a popular word in education; even if you have failed your A levels, you will still be awarded an unclassified – it's as if the word itself would make failure inevitable. Of course athletes know how to deal with failure because they have a greater understanding of their own personal psychology, which in turn leads to greater mental strength (to add to their obvious physical strength) and a higher level of psychological resilience. Many of us (both pupils and those involved in education) remain relatively ignorant of the link between psychology and success, assuming that, for example, our intelligence is of fixed, innate and unchangeable quantity. In fact, adolescent intelligence (as measured by IQ scores) fluctuates considerably, leading Angela Duckworth (an assistant professor of psychology at the University of Pennsylvania) to conclude that academic success is more to do with motivation and grit rather than to being born bright.

Abilities are therefore flexible rather than fixed. Stanford University psychologist Carol Dweck believes that success and failure are determined by what the individual understands about himself or herself, dividing the world into those who have fixed mindsets and those with growth mindsets. Fixed 'mindsetters' are of the opinion that success and failure are somehow genetically programmed into us so that the child who believes themselves to be unintelligent will never be able to succeed academically; more worrying is that teachers with a fixed mindset employ their own preconceptions and prejudices and transfer them onto those who fulfil the requirements of the successful student or the failure. Contrast this with the growth 'mindsetter'. Dweck found that teaching young children about the way in which the brain learns actually made them more likely to succeed in academic tests. A growth mindset allows us to believe that our intelligence is a fluid entity and we have great control over how intelligent we are and how successful we can be. Those with a growth mindset view failure as a temporary stop on the way to success, in the same way that an Olympic cyclist views missing out on a medal as an opportunity to assess, improve and get that gold medal next time around.

If success is within our personal control, then the way in which we praise pupils should reflect this view. Praising innate abilities ('You're very clever') leads to a fixed mindset (as does telling a child that they provided a very good answer even if the answer was completely wrong), praising the effort, on the other hand, makes success about hard work rather than something that is given. Pointing out how and why failure has occurred should be seen as part of the learning process, rather than an end in itself. Failure should be seen as an opportunity to grow and should never be brushed under the carpet in order to conceal our embarrassment or shame. So, let's hear it for failure. You're just one more step on the road to success.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/2012/aug/16/a-level-student-success-failure>

Organic food's salad days are over

I have a confession to make to my wife. Every time I return from the corner shop with “normal” milk rather than organic, it is not because they have sold out, as I innocently claim. It is because I have calculatingly bypassed the bottle with pretty flowers on and curly writing, and reached for a standard two-pinta. It is my little protest. Against the tyranny of expensive, organic baby food that is taking over our fridge – all packaged in twee, smiling, happy sachets and pouches. Dancing children and sunshine, “yum yummy cookies for little tummies” and “full of simple natural goodness”.

I was brought up in an era of Findus Crispy Pancakes and Angel Delight, and it did me no harm. I look at my nine-month-old child, with his face smeared in organic butternut squash and prunes, and suspect that I have been sucked into a great middle-class con trick. A splash of highly processed milk on his morning Weetabix will do just fine, I think. Now, it would appear, I have science on my side. Stanford University Medical Centre has concluded that there is no clear evidence of any added health benefit to organic food. The researchers sifted through 240 different studies and were unable to identify specific fruits or vegetables for which organic appeared consistently to be the healthier choice. They also found that the risk of E. coli contamination was unrelated to farming methods. It is the latest salvo fired in a long-running war between the organic food industry, scientists and increasingly confused British shoppers. The research could not come at a worse time for the organic industry in Britain, which last year witnessed a sales drop of 4 per cent in organic products to £1.67 billion – the third consecutive year when sales have fallen significantly in this country. At one point, annual sales were more than £2.1 billion. The great organic boom of the Nineties and Noughties, which saw organic food transformed from a minority interest espoused by the lentil-munchers of north London into a major industry supplying every supermarket in the country – even McDonald's – has come to an end.

The recession is largely to blame, as consumers decide that a scoop of organic Sandringham Duchy Original strawberry ice cream is a luxury they can probably afford to skip. I should point out that there are plenty of reasons to buy organic. There are lower levels of pesticides used in vegetables and fruit. The farming processes tend to be less intensive, though that means more land is required to rear each cow or pig. And, as a general rule, the standards of animal welfare are far higher – though just because an organic hen is allowed more space to lay its eggs than a free-range one (which is the case under most organic schemes) does not necessarily mean it is treated better by the farmer. But the evidence that organic food is actually “healthier” looks increasingly shaky. The Stanford report follows a similar exercise undertaken by the Food Standards Agency in 2009, which concluded that organic food was “unlikely to be of any public health relevance”. With sales on the slide, the industry is not happy with the American research. Lord Melchett, the policy director at the Soil Association, the charity that promotes organic products, says: “It's definitely unhelpful. But it's fair to say that most people make up their minds whether to buy organic based on experience, friends and family, rather than what they read.” But outside of a minority of committed consumers, aren't most shoppers putting organic in their basket for a variety of fuzzy reasons that it makes them feel good? “I'd never for a moment say any organic customers were fuzzy!” says Melchett.

Fairly disparate lifestyle decisions are behind many middle-class customers choosing to pay a premium for organic. Recent research by an organic trade body listed the main reasons: just over 6 in 10 said it was because of the lower levels of pesticides in organic, 57 per cent said it was because it was “natural and unprocessed” (though it is unclear how that was defined), and 52 per cent said it was because it was “healthier for me and my family”. And when a group of non-buyers were quizzed why they did not choose organic, the second biggest reason – with 1 in 5 stating it as the reason – was because organic food was no healthier. The first reason overall was price.

Nutrition, then, has become a key battleground and, unsurprisingly, the organic lobby has hit back at the Stanford report. It said it had applied a methodology normally used to assess medicines to studying crops, which are affected by the climate and the weather. It also pointed out that there are studies that prove the health benefits to organic food. One long-term study in the Netherlands found that children who consumed organic dairy products had a 36 per cent lower risk of eczema by the time they turned two. But this is the problem – every time a report championing organic is published, a rival comes out to debunk it. Also, the industry has been hit by competition from rival “ethical” schemes such as Red Tractor, Freedom Food, Leaf and Fairtrade, all of which have caught the eye of consumers during the downturn. Curiously, Fairtrade sales have continued to boom, while organics have been on the slide. So concerned has the industry been that it launched a lobby group, the Organic Trade Board, to advertise the benefits of its food. It, however, has already fallen foul of the Advertising Standards Authority, which told it to stop running an advert that suggested organic cows automatically enjoyed better standards of welfare than standard cows. Despite the mounting confusion, there is one organic area that continues to boom: baby food, which saw an increase in sales of nearly 7 per cent last year. It is difficult to walk down a supermarket aisle and find a non-organic product these days. The Farley’s rusks of my babyhood are shoved to the bottom shelf, while the middle shelves are filled with a whole host of brightly packaged products from companies such as Ella’s Kitchen, Organix and Hipp, all of which gently suggest they are better for your baby than normal food. One of Ella’s many slogans is “Yippee, we’re good in every sense!” while Hipp’s website says organic “means natural, pure and healthy”. Indeed, of the 430 baby-food products on sale in Tesco, 228 are organic. Lord Melchett admits that fear plays a part in the boom in organic baby food: “Mothers often say: ‘I don’t want to run the risk’.” But too much about child-rearing now feels as if it is about following a health-and-safety manual, and I for one feel rather resentful that I should fork out for organic just because it might be a “lower risk”. Tomorrow, the baby is going to get an extra dollop of pesticide-sprayed carrots.

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/earth/agriculture/organic/9520223/Organic-foods-salad-days-are-over.html>

Would you want to live to 100?

Remarkably, two in five girls born today will live for a century, and boys are close behind. But, asks Jeremy Laurance, is longevity all it's cracked up to be?

Human beings have dreamed of delaying the ageing process for millennia. From olive leaves in ancient Egypt to the alchemists' "elixir of life", vast resources have been spent – and still are today – on tonics, potions and vitamins in the attempt to stave off the ravages of the years. Now we know the secret. Quietly, without fanfare, we are putting it to work. Life expectancy soared by 30 years in richer nations during the 20th century and shows no sign of slowing. In some countries it has increased by three months a year for the last 160 years. When the British tradition of sending a telegram from the monarch to all new centenarians began in 1917, King George V dispatched 24 celebratory messages. By 1952, the number had increased 10-fold and by 2011 it had increased almost 40-fold to nearly 10,000. Professor John Appleby, chief economist at the King's Fund, the health policy think tank, cites the figures in the *British Medical Journal* today and asks: "Where will it all end?" That is an economist's question. For those of us alive today who may yet reach 100, there is another question: would we want to?

The Office for National Statistics has estimated that nearly 40 per cent of girls born this year will live to be 100, rising to 60 per cent for those born in 2060. Boys are not far behind. What we cannot know is whether, if asked, they would choose to live so long. Jonathan Swift understood the question. *Gulliver's Travels* features a race of humans, the *Struldbrugs*, who were normal in all respects except one – they did not die. But their immortality, instead of being a blessing, was a curse, because they continued to age. "At 90, they lose their teeth and hair; they have at that age no distinction of taste, but eat and drink whatever they can get, without relish or appetite. The diseases they were subject to still continue... the question therefore was not, whether a man would choose to be always in the prime of youth, attended with prosperity and health; but how he would pass a perpetual life under all the usual disadvantages which old age brings along with it." In a recent article, Walter James, who celebrated his 100th birthday last year, wrote movingly of the deprivations of age, not on his body or mind, but on his emotions. Though he still shops, cooks and looks after himself, does the crossword, enjoys a glass of whisky and can recall events from his past with clarity, what he cannot recover are the feelings and sensations that accompanied the events. Recounting his sporting successes and sexual adventures, he notes the absence of the excitement and exhilaration that went with them. "My memory has kept the bones but lost the flesh around them." He adds: "Perhaps the greatest loss is what it is like to be in love. I can remember the routines of being in love, the shared meals, concerts and theatres, walks in the country, "But writing all this is like taking a book down from the shelf and leafing through its pages. What escapes me is that extraordinary sense, which so many share, of being in love." Such observations are bound to make those younger wonder – is ageing, at the rate those of us fortunate enough to live comfortable lives in the West are achieving, something to be celebrated or feared? The pace of advance is astonishing. As recently as 1980, scientists believed that age 85 would mark a natural limit for average life expectancy. In Japan that barrier was passed for women in 2007. In the UK, average life expectancy for both sexes born today is over 90. What is the secret – the elixir of life? It is not some fancy nostrum. Just better standards of living, education and healthcare. Dull, perhaps, but marvellously true. In the early part of the last century, improvements in infant and child survival contributed most to growing life expectancy, but since the 1950s the biggest gains have been in the over-80s – the pay-off for improvements in how we eat and drink, where we live and what we do. What worries most people about ageing is losing their faculties and the ability to perform the daily tasks of living – eating, dressing, bathing and getting around. The trends in this regard are worrying. The good news is that despite increases in cancer and chronic conditions such as diabetes and arthritis, earlier diagnosis and improved treatments have rendered these conditions less disabling. In the future, more of us will fall ill, but the illnesses should

affect us less. The result is that we may live to see our great-grandchildren and even our great-great-grandchildren. The bad news is that there are large differences between countries in healthy life expectancy beyond 65 – that is, years spent without disability – and the UK performs poorly compared with some of our European neighbours such as Italy and Belgium. According to the 2010 Global Burden of Disease study, over the last 20 years healthy life expectancy in the UK has increased for women by 3 per cent at birth, while overall life expectancy has increased by 4.6 per cent. If ageing is to be celebrated, we need answers to the personal, social, financial and health challenges it poses. One suggestion, proposed by Professor Kaare Christensen, of the Danish Ageing Research Centre, is to extend working lives by shortening the working week. It would be a way of keeping more people busy, solvent and socially engaged. "The 20th century was a century of redistribution of income," Professor Christensen says. "The 21st century could be a century of redistribution of work. Redistribution would spread work more evenly across populations and over the ages of life. "Preliminary evidence suggests that shortened working weeks over extended working lives might further contribute to increases in life expectancy and health. Work till you are 100? Now that would deserve a celebratory telegram.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/life-style/health-and-families/health-news/would-you-want-to-live-to-100-8462356.html>

You make your own luck

Some individuals seem to have an inexplicable abundance of good fortune. They are successful in matters of love, in their careers, in their finances, and in leading happy and meaningful lives. Yet these people don't seem to work particularly hard, nor do they possess extraordinary intelligence or other gifts. Of course there are also the natural opposites of the superfortunate; people who repeatedly fail despite their efforts and talents.

As is true with so many human problems, people tend to deal with this difficult-to-quantify inequality by giving it a name – "luck"– and then disclaiming any responsibility for how much of it they are apportioned. Luck is considered by many to be a force of nature, coming and going as inevitably as the tide. But Richard Wiseman, a professor at Britain's University of Hertfordshire, has conducted some experiments which indicate to him that we have a lot more influence on our own good fortune than we realize. Professor Wiseman executed a ten-year study to determine the nature of luck and published his findings in a book called *The Luck Factor: The Scientific Study of the Lucky Mind*. Among other things, he experimentally studied the lottery winnings from people who count themselves as "lucky" and compared them to those who are self-described as "unlucky," and found that one's perception of one's own luck before a lottery has no bearing on their likelihood of winning. Naturally this outcome was no surprise, because lotteries are driven purely by random chance. But in another test, the good professor asked participants to count the number of photographs in a sample newspaper, and subjects who had described themselves as "lucky" were much more likely to notice a message on page two, disguised as a half-page advertisement with large block letters: STOP COUNTING – THERE ARE 43 PHOTOGRAPHS IN THIS NEWSPAPER.

Obviously some measure of luck is based on chance, but this experiment and many others have led Wiseman to conclude that a significant portion of one's good fortune is not random, but rather due to one's state of mind and behaviors. He concludes that luck is an artifact of psychology, where a person is lucky not because of cosmic accidents, but because one achieves a particular mindset which precipitates and amplifies "lucky" events. While this observation may seem obvious, there are many interesting particulars in his findings. Professor Wiseman's newspaper test illustrated that people who feel lucky do indeed differ from those who do not, but not due to some outside force. The lucky individuals were paying more attention to their surroundings, which made them more likely to notice the message in the newspaper. During his long study on the nature of luck, he has found that "lucky" individuals usually possess many intersecting qualities, including extroverted personalities, a lack of anxiety, open-mindedness, and optimism. Each of these plays an important role in one's luck production. The essence of luck is opportunity, so it follows that the more opportunities one encounters and the more receptive one is to those opportunities, the "luckier" one is. Wiseman has found that lucky people smile twice as often as others, and engage in more eye contact than unlucky people do. Such outgoing, extroverted behavior exposes a person to more opportunities due to the increased social interaction. Similarly, open-mindedness allows one to encounter a greater number of unique prospects, and makes one more apt to embrace new opportunities.

Professor Wiseman has outlined four principles to help a person increase their good fortune:

Principle One: Maximise Chance Opportunities

Lucky people are skilled at creating, noticing and acting upon chance opportunities. They do this in various ways, including networking, adopting a relaxed attitude to life and by being open to new experiences.

Principle Two: Listening to Hunches

Lucky people make effective decisions by listening to their intuition and gut feelings. In addition, they take steps to actively boost their intuitive abilities by, for example, meditating and clearing their mind of other thoughts.

Principle Three: Expect Good Fortune

Lucky people are certain that the future is going to be full of good fortune. These expectations become self-fulfilling prophecies by helping lucky people persist in the face of failure, and shape their interactions with others in a positive way.

Principle Four: Turn Bad Luck to Good

Lucky people employ various psychological techniques to cope with, and often even thrive upon, the ill fortune that comes their way. For example, they spontaneously imagine how things could have been worse, do not dwell on the ill fortune, and take control of the situation.

Unsurprisingly, optimism plays a key role in luckiness, since it strongly affects luck production and luck perception. Wiseman's study shows that a lucky, optimistic person is far more satisfied with all areas of their lives than an unlucky, pessimistic person. An optimist feels lucky for spotting a silver lining, however gray the cloud... yet a pessimist will curse their luck even in the face of good fortune, because they can't see past the green grass on the other side of the fence. Fortunately, one's mindset is entirely within one's control. An unlucky person who resolves to change their luck can become more social; they can make a conscious effort to be optimistic and make the best of any situation; and they can be more open to new ideas and experiences. In short, if you go looking for luck, you'll probably find it... or so says the professor. With any luck, he's right.

<http://www.damninginteresting.com/you-make-your-own-luck/>