

**HYPOTHETICALLY SPEAKING**

## **Mirror, Mirror**

453 words

Is personality deeply ingrained from birth, or does it develop? Is character another word for personality? And, mannerisms and traits – are these part of our DNA, passed through generations, or do they develop through conscious choice or mimicking others?

There is an abundance of diverse thinking around adult influence on child attitude and behaviour, but most pre-school educators and experts agree that the first five years are crucial learning years.

I believe we are holistically tickled across mind, body and soul during the early learning years.

Consider that most full-term babies born in developed societies weigh in between 2.7kg and 4kg, so at what point does a healthy baby become an overweight ten year old, or an obese adult? Is this governed by DNA, or is it influenced by a behaviour that we take onboard?

Imperial College London's Professor Karim Meeran suggests it is indeed genetics at play – behavioural genetics.

He calls this the Thrifty gene. He suggests that the traits of a slow-moving person favouring TV channel surfing over jogging and fast food to a healthy food plate are often 'hereditary' but through the mimicking of family and friends and not because of ancestry or DNA.

Turning the Thrifty gene theory on its head, I suggest that we can influence a progressive healthy nation by helping our children embrace healthy, balanced characteristics.

We can do this by being a good role model, and not by control. By living the attitudes and behaviour of 'smart people with character', as child development expert, James Heckman would say.

My vision is that we start this modelling from birth, mindful that it is age-appropriate education that is proven to have a direct positive effect at all stages of a person's journey in life.

Research shows that the formative pre-school years are the most important stage of emotional and social development, and that a child is most impressionable at three years of age.

Indeed, the power of 'modelling' is shockingly revealed in research that monitored children in role play.

When pretending to shop for a social evening, children two to six years old were nearly four times as likely to choose cigarettes if their parents smoked and children who viewed PG-13- or R-rated movies were five times as likely to choose alcohol, according to a study featured on the Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine.

This is the reality. Children are impressionable; personality, character and traits can all be influenced.

And the hypothetical reality that I realistically vision is a United Arab Emirates where every adult is a positive role model for each other, and for our children. A nation where we all exercise healthy, balanced behaviour, good for mimicking, with no force or control in sight.



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SPEAKING  
in the words of  
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**ENDS**

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