

THE ABC OF EDUCATION

We do not seem to deal with them so much nowadays but do we remember the feeling when we received a letter? Of course, we now receive hundreds of e-mails, which can also have the same effect. Are we excited to receive a letter or are we anxious? Does the letter contain good news or bad news? The colour of the envelope may serve as a clue but the fact is that letters can spell good news for us and they can spell bad news.

It will not have escaped our knowledge that the first lesson we seem to have at school is learn the alphabet; we learn our letters. A is for Apple, B is for Ball, C is for Cat, D is for Dog and so it goes on. We quickly attach a noun to the letter. As children get older we tend to attach an adjective to a letter; A is for Amazing, B is for Beautiful, C is for Considerate, D is for Delightful. In so doing, we attach a value to the letter. By the time pupils reach Secondary schools, people begin to say A is for Academic, B is for Bureaucracy, C is for Commercial, D is for Dirty Work. When it comes to examination results, we tend to define the grades as A is for Awesome, B is for Bright, C is for Clever and D is for Dumb.

We must not be fooled by letters. Yes, certainly, A grades might well stand for Academic, Amazing, Astonishing, Awesome, Accomplished, Adaptable, Astute, Adept, Articulate, Attentive, Authentic, Appreciative, Amenable, Accountable but it is equally and dangerously possible that such a grade for such pupils might well identify them as being Arrogant, Argumentative, Average, Abysmal, Aggressive, Abusive, Abhorrent, Aimless, Abrasive, Anarchical, Aberrant, Avaricious, Aloof.

In a similar way we should realise that all the other letters that may be given to children in their academic results can also stand for different things. We may be relatively pleased with a B grade and consider it to stand for being Brilliant, Balanced, Benevolent, Bright, Broad-minded, Buzzing and Bubbly. However, B can also stand for a child being Belligerent, Boisterous, Bullying, Benighted, Backward, Bankrupt, Blasphemous, Bonkers, Bumbling, Brainwashed, Bossy, Boring or Boastful – should we go on?

Similarly, we may well look at those who gained a C grade in different ways too. We may look down on children who gain a C grade, considering them to be Complacent, Contradictory, Cantankerous, Capricious, Cowardly, Chauvinistic, Cocky, Coarse, Conceited but it is equally possible that in fact such pupils who may struggle academically to get Cs are in fact Competent, Courageous, Creative, Civil, Caring, Charismatic, Charming, Capable, Charitable, Chivalrous.

Finally we can follow the same logic when it comes to those with a D grade. We may wish to drill them for being Disastrous, Deceitful, Disruptive, Demanding, Domineering, Devious, Dogmatic, Deficient or Dour but it is certainly possible that we may declare such pupils as being Dynamic, Distinctive, Dedicated, Devoted, Disciplined, Determined, Dutiful, Dignified, Diplomatic, Dependable.

Here though is an interesting thought regarding the grades B, C, and D: parents seem to want three As for their children, not B, C, D, but the business world wants something different – and where do we find the business world? In the CBD, home of the BCD! People are Asinine, Blinkered, Condescending and Deluded if they seek to employ people simply based on the letters the person has gained in an examination.

By now the discerning reader may have worked out what letters this writer gained at A level. Fortunately various employers have been Bright, Courageous and Daring in taking him on their books, unless, of course, they were just Blind, Carefree or Desperate.

What is in a letter, then? Is it good news or bad news? Letters in and of themselves are not important; they mean little and hide a lot. It is what is behind the letters that really matters. We may want to place enormous emphasis on the letters (or grades or symbols) that our children gain at A level but really they mean little and can easily hide a great deal. You may not Agree with us but you will do well to Believe us, Commit to this and Discover the value of what we are saying.