

**Islamic Society of North America
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David Streight presentations**

Internalizing Our Values: Are We Reaching Their Heart?

This presentation will start by having participants take the Work Quality Test. The WQT is a five-minute exercise asking nothing more of participants than that they write down four numbers, each of which reflects the participant's "best estimate" of the quality of his or her work in a new school under certain conditions. The conditions pertain to whether the work is challenging, whether the participant has any control over how the work is done, and whether the social conditions are positive or negative. Most participants indicate that when they have a certain amount of control over their work conditions, when there is a certain amount of challenge (but not too much!), and when they are liked and appreciated by their coworkers and students, the quality of their work is better than when the conditions are negative.

These three conditions exemplify the power of autonomy, relationships, and a sense of competence, and how these three human needs (not good ideas, but actual needs for healthy living) are factors in our motivation. They influence nearly everyone's motivation for quality work, just as they influence people's motivation for academics, and for character. Though the three needs vary (only slightly) from culture to culture, they have held true in studies on four different continents, and the presenter will wonder if these three concepts are not also seen in the foundation and importance of the Ummah (relatedness), in the injunction against forced conversion (no compulsion in religion—autonomy), and perhaps in the selection of Bilal as the first muezzin (competence).

After illustrating the importance of these three concepts, the presentation will look at the two parts of title of the presentation, internalizing values and reaching the heart.

Regarding the first part of the title, "internalizing our values," two conceptions will be discussed. The first is the traditional conception that has been a cornerstone of the character education movement throughout the 1980s and 90s. This is the conception recommended by national organizations like the Character Education Partnership and Character Counts! that suggests schools identify a small number of "core values" or virtues and attempt to internalize them via a variety of procedures that range from talking about them, offering examples of them, modeling them, writing about them, and celebrating them. Despite this approach's popularity with schools, especially among elementary school teachers, researchers in the fields of moral and character development are not excited about core values these days for the simple reason that there is no evidence that the approach produces results. When character programs based on values do have results, the results seem to come not from attempts to instill the values, but from other practices like teaching students the skills involved in what is called "social - emotional learning."

A second conception of developing values in children looks at values not as something that we identify and then try to instill in children, but rather as automatic developments within the child when the child is treated, and develops, in a certain way. In other words, it might be possible for a child to grow up respectful without ever hearing the word, or seeing a respect poster, or going to an assembly about respect, or receiving a sticker for being respectful. It happens almost naturally when the child grows up in a family that is loving and supportive, that encourages his or her development, that sets high

standards and helps the child reach those standards, and that teaches the child how to interact sympathetically with both family members and strangers.

This same child has the same possibilities for growing up to be empathic, responsible, and honest, but these values—rather than being instilled consciously in the child—emerge from the inside as a manifestation of the child's upbringing, not as a regurgitation of something resulting from a program.

The presentation will suggest that this latter conception of value development is more valid than the former. Curiously, this conception changes the mindset offered by the title of the presentation. It would appear that certain values might already be internal, and that the educator's task, rather than internalizing values, is thus more one of bringing them out, of externalizing them. This happens best when it is work intentionally done by a school, of course. The point might be made that there is nothing wrong with posters and assemblies and talks, provided they follow certain well-known guidelines that maximize the potential of children to grow into self-regulated human beings.

The real issue, of course, is the issue of reaching the heart, the theme of this year's ISNA conference. The bulk of this presentation will focus on four issues that are central to fostering the well-being of those around us. The first three of these issues concern the fostering of inner direction in students (self-regulated and self-motivated behavior), the fostering relationships of trust and support at school, and the fostering of certain skills—especially emotional skills, social skills, and the skills of knowing how to love. These three are the components of the WQT that started the presentation. The fourth issue concerns helping students both find meaning in their lives and develop a sense of purpose. They will be outlined in greater detail, discussing briefly three decades of research to show how well established they are. The fourth of these is meaning and purpose, which will be presented as a component of life that both facilitates development of the heart, and as an avenue of expression for the heart.

The presentation will close with a few concrete recommendations for educators to help take these concepts back to their schools for use with students.