



What Works in Character Education?

by Marvin Berkowitz and Melinda Bier



A few years ago, with grant support from the John Templeton Foundation and the Character Education Partnership (www.character.org), we examined 109 research studies in an effort to answer the question, *What works in character education?* There are four ways to approach this task:

1. **Identify published programs/curricula that have research demonstrating their effectiveness.**
2. **Identify the components of effective character education programs.** What strategies do effective programs tend to share?
3. **Analyze “home-grown” character education** (developed by schools, rather than commercially published). What do schools do that is effective in promoting character development?
4. **Examine research on individual character education practices** (cooperative learning, moral discussion, etc.).

1. Effective Character Education Programs

We identified 54 character education programs that had research to back them up. We then created a system for scoring the research designs in order to identify those studies that met the standards for research in No Child Left Behind. Through this process, we identified 33 programs (see box below) with scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness in promoting one or another aspect of character development.

Our results indicate that practitioners in search of effective character education programs have a diverse set of scientifically-supported options at every developmental level. Our list overlaps significantly with the programs reviewed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in its publication *Safe and Sound* (www.casel.org). That review offers additional information on the implementation characteristics of the programs we have identified.

SCIENTIFICALLY SUPPORTED CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Across Ages (<i>elementary, middle school</i>) 2. All Stars (<i>middle</i>) 3. Building Decision Skills with Community Service (<i>middle</i>) 4. Child Development Project (<i>elem.</i>) 5. Facing History and Ourselves (<i>middle, high</i>) 6. Great Body Shop (<i>elem.</i>) 7. I Can Problem Solve (<i>elem.</i>) 8. Just Communities (<i>high</i>) 9. Learning for Life (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 10. Life Skills Training (<i>elem., middle</i>) 11. LIFT (Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers) (<i>elem.</i>) 12. Lions-Quest (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 13. Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 14. Moral Dilemma Discussion (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 15. Open Circle (Reach Out to Schools) (<i>elem.</i>) 16. PeaceBuilders (<i>elem.</i>) 17. Peaceful Schools Project (<i>elem.</i>) 18. Peacemakers (<i>elem., middle</i>) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Positive Action (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 20. Positive Action Through Holistic Education (PATHE) (<i>middle, high</i>) 21. Positive Youth Development (<i>middle</i>) 22. Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (<i>elem.</i>) 23. Raising Healthy Children (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 24. Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) (<i>elem., middle</i>) 25. Responding in Peaceful & Positive Ways (RIPP) (<i>middle</i>) 26. Roots of Empathy (<i>elem., middle</i>) 27. Seattle Social Development Project (<i>elem.</i>) 28. Second Step (<i>elem., middle</i>) 29. Social Competence Promotion Program for Young Adolescents (<i>middle</i>) 30. Social Decision Making & Problem Solving (SDM/PS) (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 31. Teaching Students to be Peacemakers (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 32. Teen Outreach (<i>middle, high school</i>) 33. The ESSENTIAL Curriculum (Project ESSENTIAL) (<i>elem, middle</i>) |
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2. Common Practices of Effective Programs

Having identified effective programs, we were interested in what implementation strategies those programs utilized. We identified eleven major strategies: three *content strategies* (explicit character education programs, social and emotional curriculum, and academic curriculum integration) and eight *pedagogical strategies* (direct teaching strategies, interactive teaching/learning strategies, classroom/behavior management strategies, schoolwide or institutional organization, modeling/mentoring, family/community participation, community service/service-learning, and professional development).

3. "Home-Grown" Character Education

There is very little research on home-grown character education despite the fact that most of character education is of this variety. One model for investigating home-grown character education is a study by Jacques Benninga and colleagues (*Journal of Research in Character Education*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2003). Benninga examined the relationship between school-created character education and academic achievement in California elementary schools and found that schools with higher state achievement scores also scored higher on four dimensions of character education: (1) parent and teacher promotion and modeling of good character, (2) quality service-learning, (3) a caring community, and (4) a clean and safe physical environment.

4. Effective Individual Practices

Character education works— if implemented well.

There is little research on individual character education practices. One exception is cooperative learning. Robert Slavin and David and Roger Johnson have amassed more than 100 studies demonstrating the effectiveness of cooperative learning in promoting outcomes such as conflict resolution skills, greater cooperation, and higher test scores. A second exception is moral dilemma discussion; nearly 100 studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting the development of moral reasoning.

Most Consistently Impacted Outcomes

The character outcomes that were most consistently impacted positively (had the highest percentages of positive outcomes) are shown in the box at the right.

From the research, we can conclude the following:

- *Character education does work, if effectively designed and implemented.*

- *It varies.* Character education comes in many forms: whole-school reform models, classroom lesson-based models, target behavior models (e.g., bullying prevention), integrated component models, and so on.

- *It affects much.* As indicated by the "Most Consistently Impacted Outcomes" box below, character education affects various aspects of the "head," "heart," and "hand."

- *It lasts.* There is evidence of sustained, even delayed effects of character education. The Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP), Child Development Project, and Positive Action, for example, show long-term effects of elementary school character education through middle school and/or high school, and even, for SSDP, into early adulthood.

- *Doing it well matters.* Studies typically find that character education is more effective when it is implemented *fully* and *with fidelity*. It behooves character educators to maximize and assess implementation fidelity.

- *Effective strategies can be identified.* Effective programs employ many or all of the following strategies:

- *Professional development.* All effective programs build in structures for ongoing professional training.

- *Peer interaction.* All effective programs incorporate peer interactive strategies (e.g., peer discussion, role-play, and cooperative learning).

Most Consistently Impacted Outcomes

1. **Sexual behavior (91%, 10 of 11 studies)**
2. **Character knowledge (87%)**
3. **Socio-moral cognition (74%)**
4. **Problem-solving skills (64%)**
5. **Emotional competency (64%)**
6. **Relationships (62%)**
7. **Attachment to school (61%)**
8. **Academic achievement (59%)**
9. **Communicative competency (50%)**
10. **Attitudes toward teachers (50%)**
11. **Violence and aggression (48%)**
12. **Drug use (48%)**
13. **Personal morality (48%)**
14. **Knowledge/attitudes about risk (47%)**
15. **School behavior (45%)**
16. **Pro-social behaviors and attitudes (43%)**

▮ **Direct teaching.** Practice what you preach, but don't forget to preach what you practice.

▮ **Skill training.** Many strategies directly teach social-emotional skills (e.g., conflict resolution).

▮ **Making the agenda explicit.** More than half of the effective programs focus explicitly on character, morality, values, virtues, or ethics.

▮ **Family and community involvement.** Effective programs typically involve families and community members and organizations. This includes parents as consumers (e.g., offering training to parents) and parents and community as partners (e.g., including them in the design and delivery of the character education initiative).

▮ **Providing models and mentors.** Many programs incorporate peer and adult role models (both live and literature-based) and mentors to foster character development.

▮ **Integration into the academic curriculum.** Most of the 33 effective programs (on back page) didn't test for academic gains, but of the eleven that did, ten found significant effects. Especially in the age of No Child Left Behind legislation, we should strive to integrate character education into the curriculum.

▮ **Multi-strategy approach.** Effective character education programs are rarely single-strategy initiatives. The average number of strategies used by the 33 effective programs was seven.

Based on this review and our knowledge of effective practice, we offer nine broad recommendations for maximizing the effectiveness of character education:

1. Choose tested and effective implementation approaches that match your goals.

2. Train the implementers. Research has shown over and over that incomplete or inaccurate implementation leads to ineffective programs.

3. Enlist leadership support. Especially when character education is schoolwide or districtwide, its success depends on support from the principal or superintendent.

4. Assess character education and feed the data back into program improvement. Educators should assess both the outcomes and the implementation processes and consider those data as a means for improving practice.

5. Pay attention to staff culture. Principals often report that they need to first shape the culture among adults before they can effectively tackle character education and the whole-school culture.

6. Build student bonding to school. Character education depends in a large part on the degree to which students become attached to, and feel a part of, their schools.

7. Think long-term and sustain the commitment. James Comer, developer of the School Development Project, claims that it takes at least three years to begin to make a positive impact on a schoolwide culture, and that substantial effects are often seen only after five to seven years.

8. Bundle programs. Many effective character education initiatives combine components of different programs.

9. Include parents and other community representatives.

Helpful resources for parent and community involvement are available at the CASEL (www.casel.org) and Developmental Studies Center (www.devstu.org) websites. ▮

The full "What Works in Character Education" report can be downloaded from the Center for Character and Citizenship (www.characterandcitizenship.org) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Drs. Berkowitz (berkowitz@umsl.edu) and Bier (bierm@umsl.edu) conduct research and trainings through the Center.

SMART & GOOD HIGH SCHOOLS

Another "what works" report is the two-year study, *Smart & Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond*, by Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson. Based on a literature review and site visits to 24 diverse, award-winning high schools, *Smart & Good High Schools* describes nearly 100 promising practices for developing 8 strengths of character. The 227-page report can be downloaded from www.cortland.edu/character.

ATTENTION CHARACTER EDUCATORS:

The *Journal of Research in Character Education*, co-edited by Dr. Berkowitz, welcomes an array of manuscripts: research and theory-based articles, case studies of effective practices, a practitioner's column (VOICES), and reviews of books and other media. Manuscripts can be sent to jrc@umsl.edu. To subscribe, go to www.characterandcitizenship.org.

WHAT IS EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION?

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The Stony Brook School Symposium on Character
October 6, 2001

In my efforts in character education, I'm privileged to work in two different contexts. As a Roman Catholic, I am sometimes invited to speak to Catholic schools. There I begin by saying that our first responsibility in Catholic education is the care of souls—and that our approach to character formation must be guided by that mission. We must help students understand the three interrelated purposes of their lives: to save their souls and help others to heaven; to build the kingdom of God, what Pope John Paul II calls “the civilization of truth and love”; and to develop the character of Christ. This is character education in what my colleague James Hunter would call a “thick moral community,” one that has a rich tradition and shared worldview to draw on in guiding the formation of character.

Most of the time, however, I work in what Professor Hunter would call the “thin moral community” of the public schools. I don't think it is quite as thin as he makes it out to be, but nevertheless it presents us with a different set of challenges. How can we form character when we can't teach or promote a particular worldview?

Not long ago, this question came up when I was speaking to parents about character education at a public school in rural central New York. In the discussion period, a father asked, “If you can't bring the Bible into discussions of morality, then what basis do you have for saying that something is right or wrong?”

I said it was a good question. I pointed out what many theologians and moral philosophers have long held: that there is a natural moral law inscribed on the fleshy tablets of the human heart. We can discern this moral law through reason and experience. Fresh evidence for the existence of such a moral law comes from the research of Professor Larry Nucci (1985) at the University of Illinois at Chicago. Nucci asked children of several different faiths—Jewish, Catholic and Protestant—about actions such as hitting, stealing and telling lies about a person; would these things still be wrong even if God didn't give us a commandment prohibiting them?

About 85% of these children said these things would still be wrong even if God had forgotten to give us a commandment about them. All of the reasons they gave had to do with the fact that these actions were unfair or hurt other people. Then Nucci asked the same children

a second question: “What if God had actually given us a command telling us to do these bad things? Would that make it right? The response of most children is illustrated by an interview with a 10-year-old Jewish boy named Michael:

Interviewer: Michael, how do we know that what is written in the Torah is really the right thing to do?

Michael: Well, it doesn’t harm us, it doesn’t do bad for us. We believe in God. We think God wrote the Torah. We think God likes us if we do those things, and we think we are giving him presents to God by praying and following His rules.

Interviewer: OK, but how can we be sure that what God is telling us is really the right thing?

Michael: We’ve tried it. We’ve tried every rule in the Torah, and we know.

Interviewer: Suppose God had written in the Torah that Jews should steal. Would it then be right for Jews to steal?

Michael: No.

Interviewer: Why not?

Michael: Even if God said it, we know he can’t really mean it because it is a very bad thing to steal. Maybe it’s just a test, but we know He can’t mean it.

Interviewer: Why wouldn’t God mean it?

Michael: Because we think of God as very good—as an absolutely perfect person.

Interviewer: And because God is perfect, he wouldn’t tell us to steal? Why not?

Michael: Well, we people are not perfect, but we still understand. We’re not dumb. We still understand that stealing is a bad thing.

What is Michael saying? First of all, that a good God can’t give us a bad law—He would be contradicting Himself. Second, that even a kid, using his human intelligence, can figure out the moral law—can understand that something like stealing is wrong. In short, there is a natural moral law that is consistent with God’s revealed law (e.g., the Ten Commandments) but that has its own independent logic that even a child can grasp.

This centuries-old idea that there is a natural moral law is re-appearing in contemporary discussions of character. For example, in the popular book *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective Teens* (1998), Sean Covey (son of the famous Steven Covey) writes:

We are all familiar with the effects of gravity. Throw a book up in the air and it comes down. That is a natural law or a principle. Just as there are principles that rule the physical world, there are principles that rule the human world. Principles aren't religious. They aren't American or Chinese. They aren't mine or yours. They aren't up for discussion. They apply equally to everybody: rich or poor, king or peasant, male or female. They can't be bought or sold. If you live by these principles, you will excel. If you break them, you will fail.

Covey goes on to say you may *think* you can get away with violating these principles—with lying, cheating and stealing, for example—but in the end you will always pay a price. What are some of these principles? He says honesty is a principle. Respect is a principle. Hard work is a principle. Love is a principle. Moderation in all things is a principle. Service is a principle. These principles or natural laws are wired into us. We can, of course, use our God-given free will to go against these moral laws, but we can't escape the negative consequences of doing so. Covey quotes a line from Cecil B. DeMille, who directed the movie *The Ten Commandments*: "It is impossible for us to break the law; we can only break ourselves against the law."

How does all this relate to the task of character education? Let's begin with the question, "What is good character?" I would define the content of good character as virtue—and virtues as *objectively good human qualities* that we develop by living in harmony with the natural moral law.

The Fundamental Virtues

What are the virtues we need for strong moral character? The ancient Greeks named four. They considered *prudence*, or practical wisdom, to be the master virtue, the one that steers the others. Wisdom tells us how to put the other virtues into practice. It tells us when to act, how to act, and how to integrate competing virtues (e.g., being truthful and being charitable toward someone's feelings). Wisdom also enables us to make the essential distinctions in life: right from wrong, truth from falsehood, fact from opinion, the eternal from the transitory.

The second virtue named by the Greeks is *justice*. Justice is the virtue that enables us to treat others as they deserve to be treated. In their character education efforts, schools often center on justice because it covers all the interpersonal virtues—civility, courtesy, honesty, respect, responsibility, and tolerance—that make up so much of the moral life of the school. Justice is clearly important, but it's not the whole story.

The third, often neglected virtue is *fortitude*. Fortitude enables us to do what is right in the face of difficulty. The right decision in life is usually the hard one. One high school captures this truth in its motto: "The hard right instead of the easy wrong." Fortitude, in the words of the educator James Stenson, is "inner toughness." It enables us to deal with adversity, withstand pain, overcome obstacles, and be capable of sacrifice. If you look around at the

character of our kids and many of the adults in our society, we see a character that is soft and self-indulgent, that lacks the inner strength to handle life's inevitable hardships. Patience, perseverance, courage, and endurance are all aspects of fortitude.

The fourth virtue is *temperance*. By this the Greeks meant something profound, namely, self-mastery. Temperance is the ability to govern ourselves. It enables us to control our temper, regulate our appetites and passions, and pursue even legitimate pleasures in moderation. Temperance is the power to say no, to resist temptation, and to delay gratification in the service of higher and distant goals. An old saying recognizes the importance of temperance: "Either we rule our desires, or our desires rule us."

Christian tradition calls these four virtues the "cardinal virtues" because of the pivotal role they play in the moral life. All schools, secular and religious, must strive to develop the cardinal virtues, which are necessary for strong moral character. Christian schools must also strive to develop the theological virtues—faith, hope, and charity—which are necessary for transformation in Christ.

Virtues thus provide a standard for defining good character. Without such a standard, the concept of "character" becomes mired in subjectivism. We can claim that virtues are objectively good for the individual because in their absence no person can hope to lead a fulfilling life. We can claim that virtues are objectively good for society because in their absence no community can function effectively.

Character—and any particular virtue—must also be defined in terms of its essential psychological components: knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good. To possess the virtue of justice, for example, I must *understand* justice—what it demands of me in any situation (the cognitive side of character). Second, I must *care about* justice—want to be a just person, admire fairness in others, feel constructive guilt when I fall short of that standard, and have the capacity for moral indignation in the face of injustice (the emotional side of character). Third, I must *practice* justice—behave justly in my personal relationships and try to contribute as a citizen to building a more just society and world (the behavioral side of character).

What, then, is character education? It is the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue in its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. It does so intentionally through every phase of school life, from the teacher's example to the handling of rules and discipline to the content of the curriculum to the conduct of sports.

Our challenge as schools is not whether to do character education but rather how to do it well. In the rest of this paper, I would like to propose ten criteria that I think can be useful in defining and assessing effectiveness in character education. We are at a point in the national resurgence of character education where the question of quality, and how to assess quality, looms increasingly large.

Criterion 1: Character education is effective to the extent that it implements widely accepted principles of character education.

A few years ago the national Character Education Partnership published a document titled *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (Lickona, Schaps, & Lewis, 1995). These eleven principles were intended to define the essential elements of character education. Slightly abridged, these principles are:

1. *Character education promotes core ethical values.*
2. *"Character" is defined comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.*
3. *Character education is intentional, proactive, and comprehensive.*
4. *The school is a caring community.*
5. *Students have opportunities for moral action.*
6. *The academic curriculum challenges all learners and helps them succeed.*
7. *The program develops students' intrinsic motivation to learn and to do the right thing.*
8. *All school staff share responsibility for modeling and promoting good character.*
9. *There is leadership from both staff and students.*
10. *Parents and community members are full partners in the character-building effort.*
11. *Evaluation assesses the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.*

Let me illustrate just one of these Eleven Principles, number 3: *"Character education is intentional, proactive, and comprehensive."*

As an example of principle 3 in practice, consider a classroom activity carried out by Hal Urban, an award-winning teacher of history and psychology in a school outside San Francisco. He was troubled by something all of us have seen, not only among students but in our whole society: the decline of good manners. Teacher Urban decided to address the issue head on at the start of the new school year. On the first day, he gave his students a handout titled *"Whatever Happened to Good Manners?"* He prefaced this by saying two things:

In my experience, I've found that people are capable of courteous behavior when they know clearly what is expected of them. Second, the classroom is a more enjoyable place for all when everyone treats everyone else with courtesy and consideration.

Listed on this handout, under the heading "How Things Were Different Not Too Many Years Ago," were a series of Mr. Urban's observations of changes in student behavior over his 30+ years of high school teaching. For instance: *"Students rarely came late to class. When they did, they apologized. Today many come late. Only rarely does one apologize."* Another: *"Students used to listen when the teacher was talking. Today many students feel they have a right to ignore the teacher and have a private conversation with their friends."*

Under this list of behavioral observations were seven questions, including: *"Why is this happening?" "Is a society better when people treat each other with respect?" "Is a classroom better when both students and teacher show mutual respect?"*, and *"Which impresses people more—being 'cool' or being courteous?"*

Each student was asked to think about these questions and write a paragraph in response—but not sign it. Mr. Urban then collected the students' written responses and used them as a springboard for a class discussion of manners.

Urban comments: "This simple exercise [which took a full period] made a noticeable difference in the behavior of my students. Later in the semester, several students told me they wished all of their teachers would discuss manners in the classroom, because it improved the atmosphere for learning." At the end of the course one student wrote: "That manners page you handed out really made me think. Sometimes we do rude things and aren't even aware we're being rude."

What made this an effective character education activity? It combined strong moral and intellectual leadership by the teacher with active involvement on the part of the students. Mr. Urban respected his students as thinkers by asking for their input. He did so by having them write, which ensured everyone's involvement. He stimulated their thinking by posing good questions. He made manners the intentional focus of a whole-period lesson. The whole design of the lesson guided students toward the conclusion that manners are important in human relations. And he did this proactively, on the first day of the school year. It's been said that one of the hallmarks of character education is that it teaches what's right before something goes wrong. Things will still go wrong, of course—character education doesn't eliminate human nature—but now, when the teachable moment arises, you have a framework in place, a standard of expected behavior to refer to.

Effective character education, then, will do as Hal Urban did. It will be intentional and proactive. It becomes comprehensive when teachers at all grade levels in all areas of the school environment foster, by word and example, a common set of character expectations.

So this is one way to define effectiveness in character education. How well does our school's program conform to a set of principles that reflect a widely shared understanding of what effective character education is?

Criterion 2: We can say that character education is effective if it produces greater gains in students who experience the program, compared to students who do not.

In the early 1980s, a team of psychologists in San Ramon, California, under the leadership of Dr. Eric Schaps, secured foundation funding to launch the Child Development Project (CDP). CDP's character education program consists of five interlocking components:

- (1) *reading and language arts curriculum that uses values-rich children's literature*
- (2) *collaborative classroom learning*
- (3) *developmental discipline, which emphasizes community-building and group problem-solving to promote a caring classroom and student responsibility*
- (4) *parent involvement through values-based family "homework" and a school coordinating team consisting of parents and teachers*
- (5) *schoolwide community- and character-building activities such as a Buddies Program, Grandpersons' Day, Family Film Night, and Cooperative Science Fair.*

CDP was first evaluated in San Ramon, California, a relatively homogeneous middle-class suburban district in the San Francisco Bay area, where three K-6 elementary schools implemented the program and three comparable schools did not. The second phase of the research involved six socioeconomically different districts throughout the U. S.: three in California, one in Kentucky, one in Florida, and one in White Plains, New York. Two program schools and two comparison schools were selected in each district. Here are the major findings of this ambitious study (Solomon *et al.* 2000):

- (1) ***Teacher Implementation.*** Teachers in the program schools varied considerably in the degree to which they implemented the classroom components of the CDP program. Greater teacher implementation was associated with stronger student outcomes.
- (2) ***Student character outcomes.*** When most of the teachers in a given school implemented the program, students in that school were superior to non-program students in three categories:
 - * *interpersonal attitudes and behavior*—such as conflict resolution skills, trust in and respect for teachers, altruistic behavior, and commitment to democratic values.
 - * *self-related attitudes*—such as sense of personal efficacy and reduced loneliness in school.
 - * *school-related attitudes and behavior*—such as active engagement in class and liking for school.

- (3) *Follow-up findings:* In the middle school years, when the CDP program was no longer in effect, many of the above program effects were still evident (such as trust in teachers, sense of personal efficacy, and liking for school). And some new differences favoring program students emerged: They showed higher middle school grades, higher standardized achievement, and more frequent attendance at religious services (even though the character education program had no religious content). But some of the previously significant effects had weakened to the point of statistical non-significance, such as concern for others and use of marijuana and alcohol. This last finding shows the importance continuing the character education effort as students move through the grades, in order to consolidate gains made at earlier levels. Secondary schools can't assume that character development will take care of itself as the by-product of a good academic program.

We could summarize the CDP findings as follows: Character education that is comprehensive—involving classroom and schoolwide strategies, sustained over time, and aided by conditions that support teacher implementation—makes a significant and, on some measures, lasting difference in students' moral thinking, attitudes, and behavior.

Criterion 3: Character education is effective if it strengthens a school's sense of community.

Before he carried out the Columbine High School massacre, Eric Harris sent the following e-mail to the Littleton community: "Your children who have ridiculed me, who have chosen not to accept me, who have treated me like I am not worth their time, are dead." A study last year by the U.S. Secret Service reported that two-thirds of school shooters had felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others.

The psychologist and character educator Marvin Berkowitz has observed, "The school's most powerful moral influence is the way people treat each other." A central principle of character education, therefore, is that the school must be a caring community. Creating a strong sense of community is arguably the best way to prevent the peer cruelty from which much of our school violence has sprung.

Empirical evidence of the importance of this principle comes from an article in *The Journal of Staff Development* (Schaps, Watson, & Lewis, 1996) titled, "A Sense of Community is Key to Effectiveness in Fostering Character Education." The authors report research by the Child Development Project that has measured the degree to which a school has a caring community. It measures this by asking students and staff to indicate their agreement or disagreement with survey items such as: "People in this school care about each other," "Students in this school help each other, even if they are not friends," "I feel I can talk to the teachers in this school about the things that are bothering me," and "My school is like a family." Parallel items (for example, "My classroom is like a family") measure each student's experience of the classroom as a caring community.

In its study of six school districts across the U.S., the Child Development Project found that the stronger a school's sense of community, the more likely it is that its students show positive outcomes such as:

1. *Greater liking for school.*
2. *Less feeling of loneliness in school.*
3. *Greater empathy toward others' feelings.*
4. *Stronger motivation to be kind and helpful.*
5. *More sophisticated conflict resolution skills.*
6. *More frequent acts of altruistic behavior.*
7. *Higher academic self-esteem.*
8. *Stronger feelings of social competence.*
9. *Fewer delinquent acts.*
10. *Less use of tobacco, alcohol, and marijuana.*

The above data come from elementary schools. Evidence of the importance of sense of community at the secondary level comes from the 1997 National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health (Resnick et al., 1997). This landmark investigation interviewed more than 12,000 7th-to 12th-grade students from 80 high schools across the country and their feeder middle schools. The researchers looked at eight high-risk adolescent activities, ranging from sexual activity to drug and alcohol use to violence and attempted suicide. They identified two “protective factors” that tended to keep teens from becoming involved in these self-injurious behaviors. The first factor was *family connectedness*, a feeling of closeness to parents. The second was *school connectedness*, a feeling of closeness to people at school.

Criterion 4: Character education is effective if it employs practices that are research-based.

Studies like those carried out by the Child Development Project enable us to point to comprehensive programs whose effectiveness has been demonstrated. But we can also point to research demonstrating the effectiveness of each of the separate components that make up a comprehensive approach. To the extent that a school makes effective use of these various components, it can expect to have positive effects on students' character development.

For example, the comprehensive approach advocated by our Center (Lickona, 1991) includes nine classroom components and three that are schoolwide (See Figure 1). Each of these 12 strategies has its own research base (see *Educating for Character* for sample findings). Regarding the first classroom strategy—the teacher as caregiver, model, and mentor—we know from the research that a warm, caring relationship between an adult and a child enhances the adult's impact as a model and socializer.

We also know from a stack of studies that cooperative learning, if well-designed to include both interdependence and individual accountability, fosters empathy, acceptance of differences, a variety of social skills, and academic learning.

We know from the research that that conflict resolution training develops perspective-taking and ability to solve disputes without force. We know that skillfully guided moral discussions, in which the teacher asks Socratic questions, develop better moral reasoning and decision-making than do unguided discussions.

We know that discipline that develops moral understanding of the rules and class commitment leads to greater internalization than discipline that neglects reasoning and participation but instead relies heavily on rewards and punishments. We know that high academic expectations promote greater student effort and achievement than low expectations.

In short, if our character program makes competent use of educational practices that are, taken separately, shown by research to be effective, then such practices, used in combination, should be even more effective.

Criterion 5: We can regard character education as effective if classroom or schoolwide behavior improves after we implement the program, even if there is no control group.

Even without a comparison group, a character education effort can reasonably claim to be effective by making a pre- and post comparison: Did things get noticeably better after the character education program was implemented?

Suppose, as a part of your character education effort, you decide to make a major commitment to conflict resolution. A few years ago, the Ann Arbor, MI public school system did just that. Its effort encompassed all 14,000-plus students and 900 teachers, K-12. The district provided all teachers with a 6-8 hour inservice training session that introduced them to mediation techniques and showed them how to incorporate a conflict management curriculum into their classes. More than 60 teachers went on to take an additional 12-hour workshop, where they learned how to train students to be mediators. In Ann Arbor, there are now more than 125 student mediators in the elementary grades, some 65 in the middle grades, and more than 30 in the high schools.

The principal of Logan Elementary School in Ann Arbor says that in the year before the program was instituted, she had to deal with about 320 student conflicts, ranging from disputes in the cafeteria to conflicts on the school bus. After the school started using mediation, the number of conflicts requiring her intervention dropped to 27.

A program evaluation would also want to ask: Was there a drop in the number of conflicts that involved violence? Was there a drop in the number of *recurring* conflicts between the same students? If a mediation program is working, both of these indicators should show a drop. If they did, one could reasonably attribute such decreases to the school's conflict mediation program.

Criterion 6: Character education is effective if it makes an observable difference in an individual student.

Richard Curwin (1993) begins his article "The Healing Power of Altruism" with the story of Billy. A 4th-grader in a rural community, Billy was surly, fought constantly, and did little schoolwork. His father was in jail, and his mother was an alcoholic. Billy had already started to use alcohol in times of stress.

Billy's 4th-grade teacher, his principal, and school counselor got together and worked out the following plan: Billy would be the special friend and protector of a 1st-grade boy in a wheelchair, on one condition—that he not fight at school. He could help the boy on and off the school bus, sit with him at lunch, be his guardian on the playground, and visit him daily in his classroom. If he got in a fight, however, he lost the privilege of further contact with the 1st-grader for the rest of the day.

Billy watched over the younger boy as a mother might watch her baby. The boy in the wheelchair came to treasure his time with Billy. Billy's fighting dropped dramatically. He still struggled academically, but his attitude was much more positive. Billy had a new social role and a new social responsibility. Somebody was counting on him. He felt needed and important. This character education intervention developed Billy's responsibility by giving him responsibility.

We build a moral society one child at a time. It makes sense therefore to count our successes with individual children when we assess our character education efforts.

Criterion 7: Character education is effective if students testify that it had a positive effect on them.

Students' own testimonies regarding the effect of a character education program are obviously subjective but nonetheless important.

Facing History and Ourselves (www.facinghistory.org) is a published, 8-week social studies curriculum, initially developed for eighth-graders and later adapted to high school and college levels as well. It uses history, films, and guest lectures—including talks by death camp survivors—to investigate the Nazi Holocaust and the Turkish persecution of the Armenians. Along the way, it has students look within themselves to examine the universal human tendency toward prejudice, scapegoating, and hatred of those who are different from us.

An experimental study conducted by Harvard University found that *Facing History* students were significantly superior in their understanding of how individuals' decisions are affected by their society and superior in the complexity of their reasoning about issues such as leadership, exclusion, and conflict resolution. Students also keep journals during the eight weeks of the unit. Here is one girl's entry (Strom, 1980):

I'm glad this unit was taught to us, and especially to me. At the beginning, I have to admit I was prejudiced against Jews and was glad they were killed. I know this is awful, especially if that is your religion. Then you and the class discussions proved to me I was wrong! Jewish is just like me and other people.

Teachers report that years after the *Facing History* class, students come back and say that it changed them as persons. One young man in his 20s told his former teacher that he had recently cared for someone dying of AIDS—something that he attributed to his having taken *Facing History* and *Ourselves*.

Criterion 8: Character education is effective if it mobilizes the peer culture on the side of virtue.

If we do not deliberately recruit the peer culture on the side of virtue, it tends to develop in directions that are antithetical to good character. How to recruit the peer culture is illustrated by a high school in Croton-on-the-Hudson, New York. Two years before I visited it, it had instituted a school government that it called its "Congress," consisting of elected student delegates from "seminars." Students made up the majority of the Congress, but it also included elected representatives of the faculty, administration, and parent body.

The Congress met over lunch hour every Wednesday to discuss issues of concern raised by any representative. Then delegates carried concerns and/or recommendations into their respective seminars, which met immediately after the lunch period. When I attended a Congress meeting, I asked, "What have you accomplished in your 2-year history that you feel good about?" The first two accomplishments students mentioned involved dealing with vandalism. One problem was students ripping out the cafeteria phone that had been installed for student use. After this happened twice, administration refused to re-install the phone. Another problem was students' vandalizing other students' art work that hung in the hallways. Both kinds of vandalism ended after they were discussed in Congress and in seminars. One can surmise that these discussions had altered the peer culture to bring about a new norm: It wasn't cool to rip out the common phone or to deface somebody else's art work.

Participatory school democracy, which has been used effectively at all developmental levels, makes it possible for students to play an active part in creating a positive moral culture in the school. It encourages students to think: "This is *our* school. If we've got a problem, we should fix it."

Criterion 9: Character education is effective if it helps our students become effective parents when they have children of their own.

As families go, so goes a nation. No society has survived the widespread disintegration of its families. We need a 20-year plan for strengthening the American family. If the character

education movement neglects this challenge and tries to make the school the chief vehicle for developing character, it will ultimately fail.

One way to strengthen the family is for high schools to help students learn the responsibilities and commitments of marriage and parenting and how to care for young children. We need to train the next generation of parents. This is a crucial responsibility. On this point, I recommend the position paper, *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation* (1995), by the Council on Families in America. It states:

We as a society are simply failing to teach the next generation about the meaning, purposes, and responsibilities of marriage. If this trend continues, it will constitute nothing less than an act of cultural suicide.

The current generation of children and youth is the first in our history to be less well-off—psychologically, socially, economically, and morally—than their parents were at the same age. Many factors have contributed...but what ranks as the most fundamental factor of all is the weakening of marriage as an institution.

Making marriage in America stronger will require a fundamental shift in cultural values and public policy. We must reclaim the ideal of marital permanence and recognize that out-of-wedlock childbearing does harm. Our goal for the next generation should be to increase the proportion of children who grow up with their two married parents and decrease the proportion who do not.

Criterion 10: Character education is effective if it helps students to make use of all their intellectual and cultural resources, including their faith traditions, when they make moral decisions.

Character educators have taken pains to point out that developing good character in a public school does not mean teaching religion. One can promote basic virtues such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and self-control without promoting religious belief. However, this leaves an important question unanswered: What is the proper and constitutionally legitimate role for religion in secular character education?

Consider an area of young people's lives where they are highly vulnerable: sexuality. Our children are growing up in a decadent sexual culture. The media bombards them with sexual sleaze. All of this takes a toll on their hearts, minds, and souls. Approximately half of American high school students have engaged in sexual intercourse, although sexual activity among high schoolers is now beginning to drop. Approximately one million American teenage girls, most of them unmarried, get pregnant each year; slightly more than half give birth, and about 40% get abortions. According to a United Nations study, we have the highest teenage abortion rate in the developed world. According to the Centers for Disease Control, each year brings 15 million new cases of sexually transmitted disease, most of them in young people under 25. About a third of sexually active teen girls have chlamydia (the fastest growing cause of infertility) or human

papilloma virus (the cause of nearly all cervical cancer), both of which can be transmitted by skin-to-skin contact in the whole genital region. Such STDs are not, medical research shows, significantly impeded by the use of a condom (see Boudreau, 1994 & www.medinstitute.org).

Recently, there has also been attention (e.g., Lickona, 1994 & Duran and Cole, 1998) to the emotional dangers of premature sexual involvement—consequences such as regret, guilt, lowered self-esteem, difficulty trusting in future relationships, and depression (12-16-year-old girls who have had intercourse are six times more likely to attempt suicide than girls who are virgins).

There are also the character consequences of teen sexual activity. Sex is arguably the area where young people display the poorest character—the lowest levels of respect, responsibility, and self-control.

Religion impedes premature sexual activity. Wallace and Williams (1997) summarize the relationship between adolescent religiosity and sexual activity: "Attendance at religious services, self-rated importance of religion, and denominational affiliation have all been found to relate significantly to lower levels of sexual involvement. Accordingly, [religiously active teens] are less at risk of experiencing the negative physical and social health problems associated with early sexual involvement."

Obviously, public schools can't engage in religious indoctrination. In sex education, they should begin by developing the ethical reasoning that supports abstinence. For example: *Does premarital sex carry serious risks?* Yes: pregnancy, sexually transmitted disease, possible loss of fertility (as a result of STD), and injurious emotional and spiritual consequences. *Does contraception eliminate those dangers?* No, it offers only partial protection against physical consequences and no protection at all against other consequences. *Is it ever morally responsible to take serious, unnecessary risks with one's own or another's physical and psychological welfare?* Clearly, it's not.

But in addition to these non-religious arguments, public school teachers can judiciously bring religion into the picture. We can acquaint students with the empirical fact that, according to the 1992 Gallup Poll, 95% of American teens say they believe in God or a universal spirit. We can then say:

It's not the business of the school to tell you that you should or shouldn't believe in God. To do so, the Supreme Court has ruled, would be unconstitutional. But if you happen to hold a belief in God, it makes sense to bring that belief to bear on important moral decisions, including decisions about sex. If you believe in a Creator, you might want to ask yourself: How does God intend for me to use the gift of my sexuality? How can I find that out?

If students check out what their faith tradition teaches on this matter, they will find that God, in the view of major world religions, did not intend sex to be part of the relationships of unmarried teenagers. Many students, even those who practice a faith, are unfamiliar with these

religious teachings about sexuality. Many are surprised to learn the striking similarity of major world religions on this issue. Here are three examples I have shared with high school and college students:

***Rabbi Isaac Frank:** Rabbinic teaching for at least 2500 years has consistently opposed premarital sex. Judaism removes sexual intercourse from any context of selfishness or primitive lust, and enshrines it as a sanctified element in the most intimate and meaningful relationship between two human beings: marriage.*

***Father Richard McCormick, Catholic priest:** The promise of two people to belong always to each other makes it possible for lovemaking to mean total giving and total receiving. It is the totality of married life that makes sexual intercourse meaningful.*

***Muzammil H. Siddiqui, Islamic teacher:** Islam views sexual love as a gift from God. It is a sign of God's love and mercy. Islam limits sexual activity to a man and a woman within the bond of marriage.*

Exposure to such visions would contribute to the religious literacy of all students, religious and non-religious. It would help to counter society's trivialization of sex. All of this would be an educationally sound and constitutionally permissible way for the public school to draw upon religion as a support for abstinence.

These, then, are ten different ways to define effectiveness in character education. We can say that character education is effective if it: (1) implements widely accepted principles of character education; (2) produces greater gains in students who experience the program compared to those who don't; (3) strengthens a school's sense of community; (4) employs practices that are research-based; (5) is accompanied by significant improvement in students' behavior in the classroom or school; (6) produces an observable positive change in individual children; (7) elicits students' testimony that the program had a positive and enduring effect; (8) improves the peer culture; (9) helps students develop the attitudes and skills needed to be good parents; and (10) helps students to use all of their intellectual and cultural resources when they make important moral decisions.

To what extent are schools in fact doing effective character education? We know that a growing number are engaged in deliberate character education, but we have no data on what percentage are doing it well. To what extent do the changes wrought by schools endure beyond graduation, into adult life? That research also remains to be done. Can schools, while they have students in their charge, make an observable difference in their character—the degree to which they know, love, and do the good? That question we can answer: Good schools, like good families, do make a difference. That is a source of hope as we face the formidable challenge of renewing our moral culture.

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Performance Values: Why They Matter and What Schools Can Do to Foster Their Development¹

A Position Paper of the Character Education Partnership (CEP)

Executive Summary:

This position paper sets forth an expanded view of character and character education that recognizes the importance of performance character (needed for best work) as well as moral character (needed for ethical behavior). While core ethical values remain foundational in a life of character, character education must also develop students' performance values such as effort, diligence, and perseverance in order to promote academic learning, foster an ethic of excellence, and develop the skills needed to act upon ethical values. The paper reviews research on the complementary contributions of performance character and moral character to human development and achievement and describes ten practices that teachers and schools have used to develop performance character. In this expanded vision of character education, a school or community of character is one that helps us “be our best” and “do our best” in all areas of our lives.



As they come of age in a new century, our children face great and growing challenges. On a global scale, they confront an increasingly interdependent economy, exploding technological change, an environment at risk, and a world still plagued by war, disease, and injustice. In a workplace that offers diminishing job security, their ability to interact well with others and adapt to change will matter more than technical expertise.² And in their personal lives, young people face the challenge of building healthy relationships and a life of noble purpose in a culture that is often unsupportive of the highest values of the human spirit.

Schools, charged with preparing students to meet these formidable challenges, face a related yet more immediate set of challenges:

- ◆ Maintaining a safe and supportive learning environment
- ◆ Achieving adequate yearly progress on external academic standards
- ◆ Reducing drop-outs (30% nationally, as high as 50% in some urban areas)
- ◆ Improving students' performance on international tests
- ◆ Helping all students achieve and work to their potential, not just attain better grades or higher test scores.

What kind of character will young people need to meet the challenges they face in school and beyond—and how can schools help them develop it while meeting their own set of challenges?

The Role of Work in a Life of Character

“The most important human endeavor,” Albert Einstein wrote, “is striving for morality.” We are defined by our core ethical values—our integrity, our sense of justice and compassion, and the degree to which we respect the dignity and worth of every member of the human family, especially the most vulnerable among us. Research studies conducted in different cultures around the world have substantiated the universality of core ethical values.³

We are also known to others by the quality of our work. The quality

of the work we do is influenced by many factors, including our skills, the presence or absence of a supportive human environment, and “performance values” such as diligence, preparation for the task at hand, and commitment to the best of which we are capable. The importance of work in people’s lives, and even what is regarded as work, may vary among individuals and cultures. Yet in broad terms, our work is one of the most basic ways we affect the quality of other people’s lives. When we do our work well—whether teaching a lesson, repairing a car, caring for the sick, or parenting a child—someone typically benefits. When we do our work poorly, someone usually suffers. The essayist Lance Morrow notes the centrality of work to the human community: “All life must be worked at, protected, planted, replanted, fashioned, cooked for, coaxed, diapered, formed, sustained. Work is the way we tend the world.”

Where do we learn to care about the quality of our work and to develop the skills to do it well? To a large extent, in school. In his book, *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students*, Ron Berger says that during his nearly 30 years as a public school teacher, he also worked part-time as a carpenter. “In carpentry,” he writes, “there is no higher compliment than this: ‘That person is a craftsman.’ That one word connotes someone who has integrity, knowledge, dedication, and pride in work—someone who thinks carefully and does things well.”⁴ Berger continues:

I want a classroom full of craftsmen. I want students whose work is strong and accurate and beautiful. In my classroom, I have students who come from homes full of books and students whose families own almost no books at all. I have students whose lives are generally easy and students with physical disabilities and health or family problems that make life a struggle. I want them all to be craftsmen. Some may take a little longer; some may need to use extra strategies and resources. In the end, they need to be proud of their work, and their work needs to be worthy of pride.

All of us who teach would like our students to be craftsmen—to think carefully about their work, take pride in it, and produce work that is worthy of pride. Teachers, however, say they often struggle to motivate students to care about the quality of their work.



Students who don't develop an orientation toward doing their best work in school may carry that over later in life. As educators, we recognize that some students' path toward self-discovery, motivation, and accomplishment may emerge outside of the regular classroom in such venues as the fine arts, vocational arts and sciences, and athletics. By work, we mean all these forms of endeavor that engage a person in effortful and meaningful accomplishment.

Expanding Our View of Character

As character educators, how can we foster students' capacity to work and commitment to doing their work well, in school and throughout life? First, we must expand our view of character to recognize this important dimension of human development. Human maturity includes the capacity to love and the capacity to work. Character strengths such as empathy, fairness, trustworthiness, generosity, and compassion are aspects of our capacity to love. These qualities make up what we could speak of as "moral character"; they enable us to be our best ethical selves in relationships and in our roles as citizens. Character strengths such as effort, initiative, diligence, self-discipline, and perseverance constitute our capacity to work. These qualities make up what we could speak of as "performance character"; they enable us to achieve, given a supportive environment, our highest potential in any performance context (the classroom, the athletic arena, the workplace, etc.). By differentiating moral character and performance character, we do not intend to "reify" them as separate psychological entities; indeed, some persons may find it more conceptually helpful to think of these as being two "aspects" of our character rather than two distinct "parts" of character.

The moral and performance aspects of character are mutually supportive. The moral aspects, besides enabling us to treat each other with fairness, respect, and care, ensure that we pursue our performance goals in ethical rather than unethical ways. We don't lie, cheat, steal, or exploit other people in order to succeed; rather, our performance efforts contribute positively to the lives of others. The performance aspects of our character, in turn, enable us to act on our moral values and make a positive difference in the world. We take initiative to right a wrong or be of service to others; we persevere to overcome problems and mend relationships; we work selflessly

on behalf of others or for a noble cause, often without recognition or reward. In all realms of life, good intentions aren't enough; being our best requires work.

Both moral and performance character are necessary to achieve the goals for which all schools of character strive. Moral character plays a central role in helping schools create safe and caring environments, prevent peer cruelty, decrease discipline problems, reduce cheating, foster social and emotional skills, develop ethical thinking, and produce public-spirited democratic citizens. Performance character plays a central role in helping schools improve all students' academic achievement, promote an ethic of excellence, reduce drop-outs, prepare a competent and responsible workforce, and equip young persons with the skills they will need to lead productive, fulfilling lives and contribute to the common good.

Both the moral and performance aspects of character are, of course, needed for *all* of the above pursuits; for example, we must work hard (an aspect of performance character), in order to create and sustain a caring school environment, just as we must build caring relationships (an aspect of moral character) in order to be effective at helping students learn and achieve.



What Research Shows

Various studies show the contribution of performance character to human development and achievement. Stanford psychologist Walter Mischel and colleagues conducted a study, popularly known as "the marshmallow test," that assessed the ability of 4-year-olds to delay gratification (an important aspect of performance character) and then assessed the "cognitive and self-regulatory competencies" of these same subjects when they were seniors in high school. The 4-year-olds were each given a marshmallow and a choice: If they ate the marshmallow when the experimenter left the room to run an errand, that was the only marshmallow they got; but if they waited 15 minutes for the experimenter to return, they received a second marshmallow. (Psychologists note that whether a child sees delaying gratification as an appropriate response in a particular situation may be influenced by family, neighborhood, and cultural factors.⁵)

Those who, at age four, had been “waiters” on the marshmallow test, compared to those who did not delay gratification, were subsequently better able as adolescents to make and follow through on plans; more likely to persevere in the face of difficulty; more self-reliant and dependable; better able to cope with stress; better able to concentrate on a task; and more academically competent—scoring, on average, more than 100 points higher on a college entrance exam.⁶ Mischel concluded that impulse control in the service of a distant goal is a “meta-ability,” affecting the development of many important psychological capacities.

In *Character Strengths and Virtues: A Handbook and Classification*, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman present theoretical and empirical support for performance character attributes such as creativity, curiosity, love of learning, and persistence.⁷ Recent research on expert performance in the arts and sciences, sports, and games reveals that stars are made, not born. Outstanding performance is the product of years of deliberate practice and coaching—training that develops performance character as well as higher levels of the target skill—rather than the result of innate talent.⁸ Longitudinal studies such as *Talented Teenagers: The Roots of Success and Failure* find that adolescents who develop their talent to high levels, compared to equally gifted peers who don’t fulfill their potential, show higher levels of such performance character qualities as goal-setting and wise time management.⁹

Research also helps us understand how the moral and performance aspects of character interact. Studies such as Colby and Damon’s *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* reveal both strong performance character (e.g., determination, organization, and creativity) and strong moral character (e.g., a sense of justice, integrity, and humility) working synergistically to account for exemplars’ achievements in fields as varied as civil rights, education, business, philanthropy, the environment, and religion.¹⁰ Students themselves affirm the complementary roles of performance character and moral character. When researcher Kathryn Wentzel asked middle school students, “How do you know when a teacher cares about you?,” they identified two behavior patterns: The teacher *teaches well* (makes class interesting, stays

on task, stops to explain something), and the teacher *treats them well* (is respectful, kind, and fair).¹¹ In other words, “a caring teacher” models both performance character and moral character.

Ten Ways Schools Can Foster the Development of Performance Character

In books, curricula, and research reports (see, for example, *What Works in Character Education*¹²) over the past two decades, the character education literature has described a great many practices for developing moral character. A smaller number of publications have also described practices that develop performance character; these resources include Berger’s *An Ethic of Excellence*, the report *Smart & Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond*,¹³ and CEP’s annual National Schools of Character publication (which profiles award-winning schools and districts, including what they do to foster achievement and excellence).¹⁴

Because performance character has received less attention in the literature than moral character, we focus in the remainder of this paper on how to develop performance values, describing ten practices—some schoolwide, some classroom-focused—that are supported by research and used by exemplary educators. These school-based strategies do not replace the important contribution that parenting practices make to performance character development; nor do they reduce the need for schools to reach out to families as partners in encouraging their children’s effort and learning. But these ten practices, especially taken together, can help to shape a school and peer-group culture that maximizes the motivation to learn and achieve, even in students who might not bring such dispositions to the classroom.

1 Create a safe and supportive learning community.

In order to be ready to learn and disposed to develop their performance character, students must feel safe and supported in school. A caring school community that respects student differences and creates a sense of belonging among students and staff lays the groundwork for hard work and academic success. A landmark study of 90,000 middle and high school students found that students who feel “connected” to school, as measured by the quality of their relationships

with teachers and schoolmates, are more likely to be motivated to learn and have heightened academic aspirations and achievement.¹⁵ (See Charles Elbot and David Fulton's *Building an Intentional School Culture: Excellence in Academics and Character* for ways to create a schoolwide learning community with a high level of connectedness around shared core values.¹⁶)

2 Create a culture of excellence. Excellence is born from a culture. Schools should therefore do everything possible to foster a culture where it's "cool to care about excellence" and where all students, given enough time and support, are seen as capable of high-quality work. When students enter a culture that demands and supports excellence, they will do their best work in order to fit in. Berger's *An Ethic of Excellence* shows how teachers can create this culture of excellence by being consistent across classrooms in expecting students' best effort and by providing well-designed project-based learning that elicits quality work. "Work of excellence is transformational," Berger writes. "Once a student sees that he or she is capable of excellence, that student is never quite the same. There is a new self-image, a new notion of possibility." As we help all students aspire to quality work in the classroom, we must also keep in mind that there are many paths to excellence, including those offered by co-curricular activities. For many young people, the entry into the experience of "craftsmanship" may be the band, the art class, or the basketball team (see *Smart & Good High Schools* for illustrative case studies). Research confirms the power of co-curricular activities to positively impact life outcomes related to both moral and performance character.¹⁷

3 Foster, in both faculty and students, a "growth mindset" that emphasizes the importance of effort. Studies indicate that our confidence in the face of challenges, another important aspect of performance character, is affected by our underlying beliefs about intelligence and personality. Over years of research, Carol Dweck found that the way in which students and adults answer questions such as, "Is intelligence set, or can you change it?" and "Are you a certain kind of person, or can you change yourself substantially?" tends to predict how

they will respond to challenges both in school and life in general. A "fixed mindset"—the belief that our abilities are for the most part set at birth—can lead us to label and stereotype ourselves and others, avoid challenges, focus more on grades than on learning, hide our mistakes, and even cheat to avoid the appearance of failure. In sharp contrast, a "growth mindset"—the belief that we can improve with effort—can lead us to be curious, engage in learning for its own sake, pursue challenges, and increase our efforts to overcome obstacles.

To persons with a *fixed* mindset, grades are an evaluation of their worth; to persons with a *growth* mindset, grades are indication of whether they have met their goals or need to apply more effort.¹⁸ Two clear educational implications of Dweck's research: (1) emphasize effort rather than innate ability ("You worked hard on that paper" rather than "You're such a talented writer"), and (2) view all students as full of potential rather than limited by labels and stereotypes. We can also foster a growth mindset and performance character development by helping students take on challenges that provide stretch but are within their current reach (not too easy and not too hard), by helping them build the skills needed for success, and by encouraging them to extend their reach over time.



4 Develop thinking dispositions in all members of the school community. Besides developing adults' and students' belief in the power of effort, we can foster other types of thinking dispositions that are part of performance character and that play an important role in learning. Project Zero at Harvard University has defined "intellectual character" to include such dispositions as being open-minded, curious, metacognitive (reflecting on thinking), strategic, skeptical, and seeking truth and understanding.¹⁹ These thinking dispositions also contain within them moral values such as willingness to listen to others' ideas, valuing what is true over what is self-serving or expedient, and being honest about one's thinking and beliefs. As

with moral values, these “habits of mind” are developed through discussion, modeling and observation, practice, and reflection. Coaching students in conflict resolution and teaching them to “think before acting” provide further opportunities for nurturing these intellectual dispositions. Such dispositions of mind should also be the guiding norm for the adults who make up the school’s professional learning community as they interact and help each other do their best work.

5 Assign work that matters. Creating a culture of thinking and a culture of excellence requires a powerful pedagogy, one that motivates students to do thoughtful, high-quality work and to acquire the performance character attributes needed to do such work. One important pedagogical practice is assigning *work that matters*—work that inspires students because it is challenging, meaningful, affects others, and is therefore intrinsically rewarding. Ron Berger describes one such project in which his 6th-graders interviewed senior citizens and wrote their biographies: “No one needed to tell them the reason for doing a quality job. These books were to be gifts to the seniors, gifts that might become precious family heirlooms. They wanted



critique and help from everyone. They read the final drafts of their opening paragraphs aloud to the whole class for suggestions. They labored, draft after draft, over their cover designs. They wanted their books to be perfect.” Doing work that positively impacts others fosters students’ intrinsic motivation by fulfilling several interrelated human needs: making a contribution, feeling connected within a community, and experiencing a sense of competence.

6 Provide models of excellence. If we want students to aspire to excellence, they must see what excellence looks like. Many schools take pains to provide students with varied examples of high-quality work on a given assignment before students begin their own work. What makes a particular drawing, science project, or piece of writing so good? What was the process of achieving such high quality? What mistakes and revisions

were likely part of the process? Berger’s *An Ethic of Excellence* offers helpful examples of how teachers can become “archivers of excellence” and use models of excellence effectively to launch student projects.

7 Develop a culture that encourages feedback and revision. Group feedback sessions can serve as a central strategy for developing performance character. Students bring their work to the circle, solicit comments and suggestions from their peers and the teacher, and use that feedback to revise and improve their work. (Some teachers encourage multiple revisions of at least some assignments, emphasizing quality of work over quantity.) The teacher uses the critique session as the optimal context for teaching students necessary academic concepts and skills. Students presenting a piece of work typically begin by explaining their ideas or goals and stating what they would like help with. Classmates respond first with positive comments and then offer suggestions, often sensitively phrased as questions: “Would you consider making such-and-such change?” Through this process of supportive group critique, guided by norms of respect and care, students function as an ethical learning community where they not only pursue their own best work but also strive to bring out each other’s best work.

8 Prepare students to make public presentations of their work. Students work harder to do their best when they know their work will be presented to an audience beyond the classroom. In some schools, every project that students complete is shared with some kind of an outside audience, whether another class, the principal, parents, or the wider community. The teacher’s role is not to be the sole judge of students’ work but to function like a sports coach or play director, helping students prepare their work for the public eye. In a similar way, some high schools require seniors to do an “exhibition”—a public presentation to a jury of teachers, peers, and at least one community expert—of long-term research or creative work. Service learning projects often involve sharing one’s work in this public way. If we require students to publicly present their work, we must, of course, help them acquire and practice the skills they will need to make successful presentations.

9 Use rubrics to help students take responsibility for their learning. Columbine Elementary School (Woodland Park, CO), a 2000 National School of Character, shows how to use rubrics to help students learn to self-assess, set goals, and in general take responsibility for their learning. Columbine has seven “personal and social responsibility standards” that are integrated into classroom instruction and students’ report cards. Performance character is represented by four of these standards: (1) “practices organizational skills,” (2) “takes risks and accepts challenges,” (3) “listens attentively and stays on task,” and (4) “evaluates own learning.” Each standard is further broken down into specific skills. For each skill, there are four levels of competence: “in progress,” “basic,” “proficient,” and “advanced.” For example, the first item under “practices organization skills” addresses “completing and turning in work.” The four levels of competence in this skill are: “*in progress*: I rarely complete my work and turn it in on time”; “*basic*: I sometimes remember to hand in my completed work, but I need a lot of reminding”; “*proficient*: I usually remember to hand in my completed work with few reminders”; and “*advanced*: I consistently hand in my work with no reminders.” Teachers conference with students individually to help them assess where they are on the rubrics and set goals for improvement.

Conclusion:

Throughout history, and in cultures around the world, education rightly conceived has had two great goals: to help students become smart and to help them become good. They need character for both. They need moral character in order to behave ethically, strive for social justice, and live and work in community. They need performance character in order to enact their moral principles and succeed in school and in life. Virtue, as the ancient Greeks pointed out, means human excellence. To be a school of character or a community of character is to strive to be our best and do our best in all areas of our lives.

10 Encourage mastery learning. In 1968, Benjamin Bloom developed an approach to teaching called mastery learning that has much potential to develop performance character. Mastery learning requires all students to achieve a certain level of mastery of a given concept or skill.²⁰ If they do not achieve it on the first try, they keep trying. Five of the six major research reviews of this approach substantiate its positive effects on student achievement.²¹ (Mastery learning, like any other pedagogy, can be abused; it can lead to demoralization if students are asked to perform at certain levels but are not helped to attain those standards.) At Quest School (Humble, TX), a 2002 National School of Character that uses mastery learning, a teacher explains: “Our whole program is about perseverance. In the beginning, kids don’t realize that they will have to redo an assignment—two or three or four times—until they get it right. They learn to persevere.” A student offered his view of mastery learning’s benefits: “You have to know your work forwards and backwards. If your data analysis on a project isn’t good, you’ll get it back. And if you get lower than a B in a class, you retake it.” A school leader added: “Over the four years, students come to set an internal bar for the quality of their work. Our goal is for them to internalize the revision process. They know that in senior year, they have only *one* chance to revise a paper or re-take a test. They begin to turn in quality the first time.”

Notes

1. This paper's expanded view of character as including moral and performance character builds on work first presented in Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson's *Smart & Good High Schools*, jointly published by the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs and the Character Education Partnership in 2005 with major funding from the John Templeton Foundation.
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