CHARACTER EDUCATION: THE MISSION OF EVERY SCHOOL

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The formation of character, historically part of the mission of all schools, is returning to its once central place in American education. The natural moral law provides objective moral content -- virtues such as respect and responsibility -- for character education in a pluralistic society. Character is best developed through a comprehensive approach that promotes virtues through every phase of school life. Three schoolwide and nine classroom strategies are here described, along with guidelines for character-based sex education and constitutionally legitimate ways to integrate religion into character education.

The character education movement – the systematic effort to teach virtue – is arguably the fastest growing educational movement in the country today. The 1990s have seen a spate of books on character education, U. S. Department of Education grants to the states for character education, the emergence of several national organizations dedicated to promoting character education, university-based centers for character education, an explosion of grassroots character initiatives by schools and communities, and a flurry of media attention to the movement.

I recently spoke about character education in a small rural community not far from where I teach in Cortland, New York. In the question and answer period, a man asked: "If you can't bring the Bible into school discussions of morality, what basis do you have for saying something is right or wrong?"

I appreciated his question. It brought into sharp focus the challenge faced by the public schools: How can they teach morality in a way that compels rational assent without requiring religious belief?

I responded to this man by saying that I am a Roman Catholic. My faith tradition and many philosophers have long held that there is a natural moral law that is built into human nature, just as there is a law governing physical nature. We can discern this natural moral law through reason and experience. When we follow the moral law, we live in harmony with ourselves and each other. When we act in ways that go against this natural law – when we lie, cheat, steal, or have sex with whomever we please – we inevitably create problems for ourselves and others. And so you can come to a moral truth – that it's wrong to steal, for example – either through reason or revelation. The revealed moral law (God's commandments) and the rational moral law express the same truth. Therefore, people of all faiths, and people of no religious faith, can agree that moral virtues such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and fairness are the rational foundation of a civil society and the basis of good character.

The existence of a natural moral law accessible to reason is confirmed by some recent research on children's moral thinking. University of Illinois psychologist Larry Nucci asked several hundred Jewish, Catholic, and fundamentalist Protestant children to make moral judgements about acts such as lying, stealing, and damaging somebody's reputation. Would these acts still be wrong, Nucci asked, even if God had not given us a command forbidding them?

Nearly all of the children of all faiths said yes, such actions would still be wrong, even if God had not forbidden them. All of the reasons children gave for this moral judgement had to do with such actions being unfair or harmful to others (Nucci, 1985).

In a subsequent study, Nucci asked children a different question: What if God had given a commandment to do something they considered wrong? Would that make it right? Here is one such 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: God doesn't harm us, do bad for us. We believe in God. We think that God wrote the Torah, and we think that God likes us if we do those things, and we think we are giving presents to God by praying, by following his rules.

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

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

Interviewer: Let's suppose that 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 says it, we know he can't mean it,

because it's a very bad thing to steal.

Maybe it's a test - but we just know that 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 he's perfect he wouldn't say to steal? Why not?

Michael: Well, because we people are not perfect, but we still understand that stealing is a bad thing (Raths, Harmin, & Simon, 1996).

Children of other faiths, Nucci reports, gave responses parallel to Michael's. What is Michael saying? That there is an immutable moral law. A perfect God couldn't contradict the moral law without contradicting himself. Even an imperfect kid, as Michael points out, can use his human understanding to recognize that something like stealing is bad.

The existence of a natural moral law – which tells us to be just and caring towards others – gives public schools objective moral content that they may legitimately teach in our pluralistic, constitutional democracy. This natural moral law can be expressed in terms of two great moral virtues: respect and responsibility. At the State University of New York at Cortland, we have a Center for the 4th and 5th Rs. We argue that respect and responsibility are the foundation of moral literacy and that teaching these virtues should be central to the mission of every school, public or private, secular or religious.

Respect can be defined as showing regard for the intrinsic worth of someone or something. It includes respect for self, respect for other persons, and respect for the environment that sustains all life. Respect is the restraining side of our morality. If we respect others, we don't violate their rights or demean their dignity. Honesty, civility, and tolerance are all forms of respect.

Responsibility goes beyond respect; it's the active side of our morality. It means caring for self and others, doing our work, keeping our commitments, contributing to our communities, alleviating suffering, and building a better world. Cooperation, compassion, kindness, and moral courage are all forms of responsibility.

A Look Back

Teaching respect and responsibility seems like common moral sense. Who could be against it? And yet for a good part of this century, schools sought to remain officially neutral when it came to teaching these or any other moral values. How did this happen?

In the early days of our country, schools were seen as having two essential purposes: to develop literacy and to develop virtue. When teachers were hired, their moral reputations – which affected their ability to serve as moral role models – were considered even more important than their training or level of education. In the first schools, the Bible was the sourcebook for both moral and religious instruction. Eventually, however, sectarian disputes arose over whose Bible to use and which doctrines to teach. In 1836 William McGuffey came forth to offer his *McGuffey Readers* as a way to teach schoolchildren the natural virtues espoused by all faiths and by secular society.

McGuffey Readers gave pupils a daily diet of inspiring stories about honesty, hard work, thriftiness, kindness, patriotism, and courage. They read of how Susie Sunbeam helps a "poor and ragged little girl" by giving her one of her own dresses and a pair of shoes. They read of how Henry the bootblack returns a wealthy man's wallet, uses the reward of a dollar to start a shoe-shining business, and with the money he earns is able to support his sick mother and little sister. By 1919 the *McGuffey Reader* had the largest circulation of any book in the world next to the Bible.

In the twentieth century the confident consensus supporting old-fashioned character education began to crumble. It did so under the hammer blows of several powerful forces.

The philosophy of logical positivism, arriving at American universities from Europe, asserted that facts and values were radically different. Moral claims such as "Stealing is bad" and "Kindness is good" could not be proven in the way that scientific claims could be proven; therefore moral claims had no status as objective truth. As a result of positivism, morality was subjectivized – made to seem purely a matter of subjective opinion, not a matter for public debate and certainly not for public transmission through the schools.

In the 1960s, the country felt the effects of a worldwide rise in "personalism." Personalism celebrated the worth, autonomy and subjectivity of the person. It emphasized individual rights and freedom over responsibility. Personalism rightly protested societal oppression and injustice (racism, sexism, and institutional corruption), and it advanced human rights. But it had a destructive downside: It delegitimized moral authority in all realms (school, family, church, and government); further eroded belief in objective moral norms; led people to become preoccupied with self-fulfillment; weakened social commitments such as marriage and parenting; and fueled the socially destabilizing sexual revolution.

At the same time, the rapidly intensifying pluralism of American society raised the vexing question, "*Whose* values should we teach?" Finally, the increasing secularization of the public arena, notably the 1963 Supreme Court decision banning school prayer, caused people to worry, "Won't moral education get you into religion, and isn't that unconstitutional?"

When much of society came to think of morality as being entirely subjective and not something that we could ever agree on in a pluralistic and secular society, public schools retreated from their once central role as character educators. "In our district," says a retired elementary school teacher, "it happened in the mid-1950s. The word came down from the administration that we were no longer to teach values; we were to stick to academics." "Somewhere between Sputnik and computers," observes another veteran teacher, "morality got lost."

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In the late 1960s, values education returned but in a very different form: values clarification. This new approach swept onto the scene, capturing the personalist spirit of the times and giving schools a way to talk about values while preserving their value neutrality. In values clarification's bold manifesto, *Values and Teaching* (1966), authors Louis Raths and colleagues proposed to replace "traditional ways of teaching values" – such as setting a good example, inspiring, using the arts and literature, religion, and appeals to conscience – with a focus on *process*. The first step in values clarification's 7-step valuing process was "choosing freely." So strong was the authors' commitment to free choice that they wrote, "It is entirely possible that children will choose not to develop values. It is the teacher's responsibility to support this choice also" (Eger, 1982).

To many parents, it came as a shock to find out that this kind of values education was being taught to their children. In the journal *The Public Interest*, Martin Eger presents a detailed case study of two small towns in upstate New York where parents mounted a formal protest when they discovered values clarification was going on in their school system. Eger writes:

> These people had thought until now that whether to become an engineer or a farmer was certainly a "free" and personal decision. But they never believed that whether or not to cheat was in the same category. And this, it seemed, was what the school was saying. One mother wrote: "If I teach my child that cheating is wrong, and values clarification teaches a child that there are no right answers, no wrong answers but to choose freely, it most certainly upsets the house (Eger, 1982).

Because values clarification lacked an ethical framework to distinguish good values from bad ones, even seemingly innocuous activities could backfire. Consider what happened when one of my graduate students, an eighth-grade math teacher, tried a popular values clarification activity called "20 Things I Love To Do" with one of her low-achieving classes. She says:

> When we shared our lists, the four most popular activities were: sex, drugs, drinking, and skipping school. I asked why these were the most popular, and these are the things my students said: "I don't need this class to graduate, so why come?"; "School isn't important;" "Everyone drinks and smokes dope;" "Pot doesn't harm you;" "All my friends do it, so why can't I?"; "Sex is the best part of life;" and "Sex, drugs, and rock and roll rule."

Not sure what to do next, this teacher asked her students to define "values." One boy responded: "What I like doing." Others agreed. The teacher comments: "The students said they enjoyed doing this activity. They said they found they had values in common with others around them." The upshot: These students had new peer support for their

rule-breaking and self-indulgent life styles; and the school, in the person of the neutral teacher, had given tacit approval to their hedonistic value system.

During the 1970s, values clarification got some competition from other approaches – such as Lawrence Kohlberg's "moral dilemma discussions" and an approach called "rational decision-making" developed by moral philosophers. These approaches rejected value clarification's moral relativism and attempted to help students develop better moral reasoning. But their focus was still on "process" – thinking skills – rather than on moral content. Teachers using these methods didn't see it as their responsibility to model or teach particular moral values or behaviors.
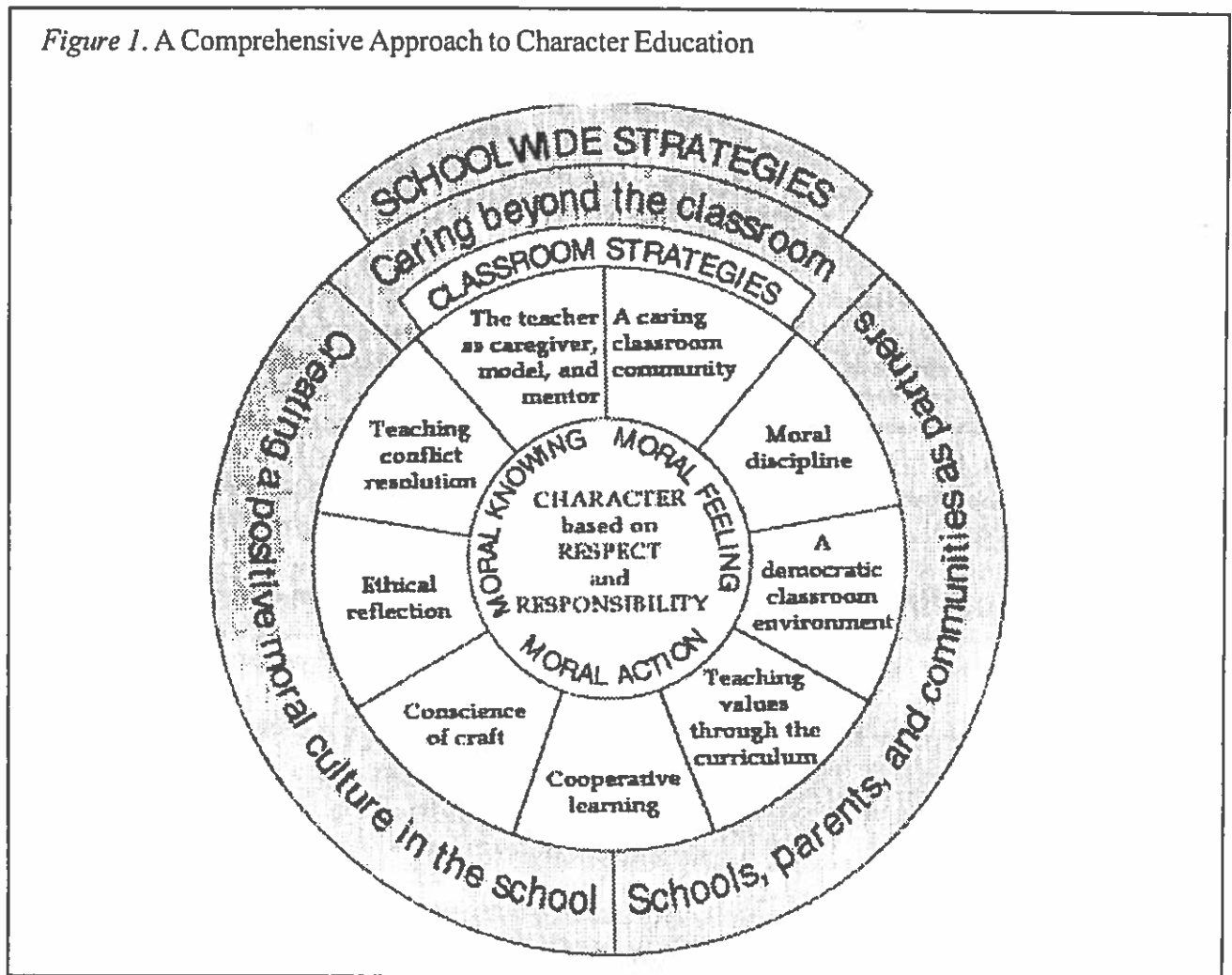
The Nature of Character Education

The current character education movement is a reaction against the process-centered, non-directive, and overly cognitive methods of recent decades. In poll after poll, a large majority of Americans say that the United States is in moral and spiritual decline. Non-directive moral education has not helped this situation; it has been part of the problem.

Character education is a return to the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue. It's not letting kids decide for themselves what's right and wrong; rather the school stands for virtues like respect and responsibility and promotes them explicitly at every turn. It's not just talk; thinking and discussing are important, but the bottom line is behavior. Actions, as the psychiatrist Robert Coles has observed, are the ultimate measure of our character.

Character education is not a separate course, though that can be part of it. Rather it's a whole-school effort to create a *community of virtue*, where moral behaviors such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and kindness are modeled, taught, expected, celebrated, and continuously practiced in everyday interactions. Practice is key. That's because a guiding principle is the idea, going back to Aristotle, that virtues are not mere thoughts; they are habits we develop by performing virtuous acts.

Good character can be defined as the constellation of virtues possessed by a person. Every virtue has three parts: moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral behavior. To possess the virtue of justice, for example, I must first understand what justice is and what justice requires of me in human relations (moral knowledge). I must also care about justice – be emotionally committed to it, have the capacity for appropriate guilt when I behave unjustly, and be capable of moral indignation when I see others suffer unjustly (moral feeling). Finally, I must practice justice – act fairly in my personal relations and carry out my obligations as a citizen to promote social justice (moral behavior). Thus, in order to develop virtuous character in their students, teachers must help young people know what the virtues are, appreciate their importance and desire to possess them, and practice them in their day-to-day conduct. Character education thus conceived seeks to develop a morality of the head, the heart, and the hand.

Figure 1. A Comprehensive Approach to Character Education

What kind of character education offers the best hope of developing full human character? Our Center at SUNY Cortland promotes what we call a "comprehensive approach." This approach uses all phases of the school's moral life as deliberate opportunities for character development. It offers twelve strategies, nine that are classroom-based and three that are schoolwide (see Figure 1). (See *Educating for Character* for a fuller discussion) (Lickona, 1991).

Schoolwide Strategies

Let me begin with schoolwide strategies that show what a difference it can make when the whole school works on the same character goals.

1. Creating a positive moral culture in the school. This means developing a total moral environment – through the leadership of the principal, schoolwide discipline, a schoolwide sense of community, meaningful student government, a respectful and cooperative moral community among adults, and making time at all levels to discuss moral concerns – that supports the virtues taught in classrooms.

2. Fostering caring beyond the classroom. This means using positive role models to inspire altruistic behavior and providing opportunities at every grade level to perform acts of school and community service.

3. Recruiting parents and the community as partners in character education. This involves letting parents know that the school considers them their child's first and most important moral teacher; giving parents specific ways they can teach at home the same character qualities the school is trying to teach; and seeking the help of the community – including churches, businesses, local government, and the media – in promoting good character.

Let me offer two examples that illustrate these schoolwide strategies.

Brookside Elementary School. Brookside Elementary, located near Binghamton, New York, is part of our growing Central New York network of character education schools. Lynn Lisy-Macan, principal at Brookside, came with a team of teachers to our first Summer Institute in Character Education in 1995. The staff then spent the fall semester in planning, and in spring 1996 began to implement their program.

Brookside focuses on a character attribute a month, as follows:

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September:	Responsibility
October:	Respect
November:	Thankfulness
December:	Kindness and Courtesy
January:	Self-Control
February:	Tolerance
March:	Perseverance
April:	Citizenship
May:	Honesty
June:	Cooperation

Within the curriculum, language arts and social studies are used to study and discuss these virtues. Brookside's librarian, Marge Day, has prepared reading lists of age-appropriate children's books corresponding to each of the character qualities. Class meetings are used to develop classroom communities that strive to live out the virtues.

Each month, students prepare the "Caring Calendar," which is distributed to the entire student body and to parents. The Caring Calendar has daily suggestions for how to show the character quality of the month. During September's focus on responsibility, for example, suggestions include: "Responsible students listen to their teacher," "A responsible student remembers to bring in homework," and "Do you pick up your mess at home and at school?" At monthly assemblies, grade levels take turns sharing the learning that has taken place concerning the quality of the month.

Each month, a parent committee creates the "Character Corner," a page of suggestions that goes home to all families and is published in the local newspaper. The Character Corner suggests behaviors to encourage at home ("Show your child how to hold the door open for the next person who is coming"), bedtime reading related to the focus virtue, and family videos that reinforce the quality.

Each week, WMGC, the local TV station, comes to Brookside to film "The Character Minute." Teachers and students brainstorm ways to capture what the school is doing that week to highlight the monthly virtue. The Character Minute airs every Monday night on the 6 PM and 11 PM news.

Brookside has also implemented quarterly bus meetings to improve bus behavior. In many schools, the school bus is a traveling moral jungle. Younger children are afraid to ride the bus because of the harassment they receive from older kids. At Brookside, all the children who share a bus ride sat down with two or three teachers and their bus driver and discussed the following questions: What does a safe and respectful bus ride look like? What does a safe and respectful bus ride sound like? And how can each of us contribute to a safe and respectful bus ride? Three follow-up meetings over the school year help to monitor any problems. The bus drivers said they greatly appreciated having a chance to talk with the children about why good behavior on the bus is important.

Finally, to extend caring beyond the school, individual classrooms at Brookside are each choosing a local charity to work with. As a result of staff, student, and parent enthusiasm about Brookside's character effort, other schools in the district are now looking into starting a character education initiative.

Jefferson Junior High. Jefferson Junior High School in Washington, DC offers a character education success story at the middle school level. At Jefferson, ninety percent of the students come from single-parent families. "When I arrived," says principal Vera White, "parents and the community felt they were losing the children – to the gangs, to the drugs, to the violence." Theft and fighting were common. Twelve to fifteen girls got pregnant each year.

Principal White met with faculty, parents, students, and members of the community, including clergy. They decided they needed a multi-year plan. Year 1 would focus on setting objectives and strategies. Developing students' "sense of responsibility for their own behavior" became the primary goal. Year 2 would have the theme "attitude counts wherever you go." Year 3 would focus on conflict resolution training, Year 4 on community service. Every student at Jefferson now does community service.

Personal responsibility is now the theme of daily morning meetings in homerooms and grade-level assemblies each week. Students are expected to have assignments notebooks, to use them in every class, and to take their schoolbooks home with them each day. To strengthen its academic curriculum, Jefferson formed a partnership with a nearby business, the COMSAT Corporation, which has helped to develop a strong, state-of-the-art program in math, science, and technology. Jefferson's character-building effort has also incorporated three sexuality education programs, including Elayne Bennett's Best Friends curriculum, (Bennett, 1995) all of which teach students reasons and skills for abstaining from sexual activity.

The school has also sharply raised expectations for parents. "Our parents," Vera White says, "must come to school for Back to School Night and for teacher-parent conferences during the year. Every parent is also asked to volunteer 20 hours of service to the school each year." Many volunteer more.

Since implementing these changes, Jefferson experienced a marked decline in thefts and fighting. In the city of Washington, D.C., it has been recognized for having the highest student academic achievement, the greatest academic improvement, and the highest attendance rate. It has won two U.S. Department of Education awards and now has a waiting list of 400 to 500 students. Between 1993 and 1995, according to Principal White, it had only two known student pregnancies.

Again, you can see the components of a successful schoolwide approach: Create a total school environment that expects and teaches good character; involve students in school and community service; get everyone, including parents and the community, actively involved.

Classroom Strategies

Let me briefly illustrate the nine classroom strategies that are part of a comprehensive approach.

1. The teacher as caregiver, moral model, and moral mentor. In classrooms, as in families, if we want to transmit our values to children, we must first develop a relationship. In their relationships with their students, teachers can exert positive moral influence in three ways: respecting and caring about their students; setting a good example; and providing directive moral guidance about how to behave.

For example, Molly Angelini, when she was a fifth-grade teacher, made courtesy an important virtue in her classroom. She treated all of her students with a high level of courtesy and modeled courtesy in her behavior toward anyone who came into their classroom. She required her students to apologize in writing if they called a classmate a name. She taught them to say, "Pardon me?" instead of "What?" or "Huh?" when they wished something repeated. When they went to lunch, she taught them to greet the cafeteria workers by name and to thank them when they put the food on their trays. Most importantly, she taught her children that all these behaviors were not mechanical gestures but meaningful ways of respecting other people.

2. Creating a caring classroom community. The peer culture is a powerful influence on student conduct and character. If teachers do not take the initiative to shape a positive peer culture – one that supports the virtues they are trying to teach – the peer culture will often develop in the opposite direction, creating peer norms (e.g., cruelty to schoolmates who are different, lack of academic responsibility, and disrespect for legitimate authority) that are antithetical to good character.

By contrast, when a teacher is successful in creating a moral classroom community, students learn morality by living it. They receive respect and care from their peers and practice giving them in return. At any grade level, teachers can create this kind of positive moral community in the classroom by helping students to: (1) get to know each other, (2) respect, care about, and affirm each other; and (3) feel a valued membership in the group.

For example: Hal Urban, who teaches high school history and psychology, does three simple things at the start of each class that take only five minutes but go a long way toward developing a cohesive classroom community. First, he asks, "Who has good news?" After the sharing of good news, he asks, "Would anyone like to affirm anyone else?" Students become more and more comfortable doing that. Finally, he asks students to take a seat different from the one they had in the previous class and take a minute to get to know their new neighbor. At the end of the semester, on course evaluations, students say that one thing they will remember about the course ten years from now is the way Mr. Urban began each class.

In developing a caring classroom community, teachers also need to promote kindness and prevent cruelty. In Kansas, the STOP Violence Coalition (9307 W. 74th St., Merriam,

KS 66204) publishes a book of activities called *Kindness is Contagious...Catch It!* that gives many practical strategies for promoting considerate actions and reducing the verbal peer abuse that causes conflicts, breeds disrespect, and quickly undermines positive classroom relations. In Central New York, the *No Putdowns Project* has developed a curriculum that dozens of schools have used to help create a putdown-free environment in classrooms and the school.

3. Moral discipline. Discipline, if it is to serve character development, must be more than crowd control. It must help students develop moral reasoning, self-control, and respect for others. Rules should be established in a way that enables students to see the moral values or standards (e.g., courtesy and caring) behind the rules. The emphasis should not be on extrinsic rewards and punishment but on following the rules because it's the right thing to do – because it respects the rights and needs of others.

For example, Kim McConnel, on the first day of school, puts her sixth-graders in groups of four. She asks each group to write down, on a large sheet of paper, classroom rules that "will help us: get our work done; feel safe; and be glad we're here."

When they are finished, the small groups tape their lists of suggested rules on the blackboard. Drawing from all the lists, the teacher helps the class come up a list that will serve as "our class rules."

Regardless of whether students help to create the rules, the teacher using moral discipline ensures that students understand the moral basis of the classroom rules. Moreover, consequences for rule-breaking should teach a moral lesson (for example, why the offense was wrong); they should require the student, whenever possible, to make reparation; and they should develop the student's self-control and commitment to following the rule in the future.

A high school mathematics teacher explains his approach: "I tell my students that I have only two rules: (1) Everybody respects each other; and (2) Come prepared for class every day – which is a form of respect for me, your classmates, and yourself. If you violate one of these rules, I will stop and point out the rule. If you have shown disrespect for someone else, you will need to apologize to that person."

4. Creating a democratic classroom environment. This means involving students, on a regular basis, in shared decision-making that increases their responsibility for making the class a good place to be and to learn. The chief means of creating a democratic classroom is the class meeting. This is a meeting of the whole class emphasizing interactive discussion and problem-solving. The class meeting contributes to character development by providing a forum where students' thoughts are heard and valued and by providing a support structure for understanding, internalizing, and practicing respect and responsibility.

For example: Carl Fospero, a 20-year-old graduate student in education, was called to take over an unruly class (Introductory Spanish) of high school students whose regular teacher had suddenly died. In the month that followed

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the teacher's death, the students – a low-achieving group with a history of behavior problems – had become uncontrollable. They went through four substitute teachers in four weeks.

When Carl Fospero came into the class, the first thing he did was to ask every student to take out a sheet of paper and write him a letter, responding to two questions: "What are your feelings about the class? How can we make it better?"

Students complained that other substitute teacher had been "throwing worksheets at them"; they couldn't keep up with the material; they didn't understand Spanish; they often felt embarrassed when they didn't know an answer, and so on.

Carl Fospero read portions of the students' letters aloud, using them as a springboard for a discussion of how to improve the course. They decided to slow down the pace of instruction to make sure no one got lost. They decided to make time during each class for cooperative learning – such as conversational Spanish between partners – which students found less threatening. Teacher Fospero said he also wanted to try some new things they hadn't done before, such as writing a play in Spanish and performing and videotaping it. The class also started to write and publish a class newspaper – in Spanish. They used their class meetings to plan these new projects, assign responsibilities, and monitor progress and problems.

Students' behavior and learning improved dramatically. Teacher Fospero had achieved this by applying a widely known but much-neglected educational principle: Involve students in making decisions about – and sharing responsibility for – the life of the classroom. The class meeting has been used effectively with students as young as kindergarten.

5. Teaching values through the curriculum. Boston University's Kevin Ryan, one of the leading voices in the character movement, observes that when schools set out to do character education, they often go looking for new materials, published kits and the like. These materials, if they are done well, can be useful, but as Ryan points out, schools already have a gold mine of good materials right under their noses – in the academic subject matter they teach.

Mining the school curriculum for its moral potential requires teachers to look at their grade-level curriculum and ask, "What are the moral questions and character lessons already present in the subject I teach? How can I make those questions and lessons salient for my students?" A science teacher, for example, can design a lesson on the need for precise and truthful reporting of data and how scientific fraud undermines the whole scientific enterprise. A social studies teacher can examine questions of social justice, actual moral dilemmas faced by historical figures, and current opportunities for civic action to better one's community or country.

History and literature are especially rich in moral meaning. William Bennett writes well about this: Do we want our children to know what courage means? Then we should

teach them about Joan of Arc, Horatius at the bridge, Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Do we want them to know about kindness and compassion, and their opposites? Then they should read *A Christmas Carol* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* and, later on, *King Lear*. Do we want them to know about persistence in the face of adversity? Then they should know about the character of Washington during the Revolution and Lincoln during the Civil War. And our youngest should be told about the Little Engine That Could. Do we want our children to know about the dangers of unreasoning conformity? Then we should tell them about the Emperor's New Clothes and about Galileo. And if we want them to respect the rights of others, they should read the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Gettysburg Address, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham City Jail" (Bennett, 1991).

6. Cooperative Learning. How can schools use the instructional process to develop character? Cooperative learning is one way. It gives students regular practice in developing important social and moral competencies – such as the ability to take perspective, work as part of a team, and appreciate others – at the same time they are learning academic material. Cooperative learning also contributes to the development of a cohesive and caring classroom community by breaking down ethnic, racial, and other social barriers and integrating every student into the small social structure of the cooperative group.

For example: In a sixth-grade classroom in Montreal, Quebec, a teacher faced the most divisive group she had ever taught. The class was torn apart by racial conflict; blacks and whites exchanged insults and physically assaulted each other during recess and after school. The school psychologist observed the class and recommended that the teacher set up structured cooperative learning groups. Put together children who have trouble getting along, he said. Give them joint assignments and projects with roles for all members. Monitor them closely and teach them to monitor themselves. Most important, stick with the groups even if they don't seem to be working in the beginning.

The teacher started having students work together – usually in threes or fours – in all subjects for part of each day. They worked on math problems in groups, researched social studies questions in groups, practiced reading to each other in groups, and so on. "It took them two months to really make this work," the teacher said, "but they finally got it together. Moreover, their test scores went up." Mastering the skills of cooperative learning is a gradual, developmental process for both teacher and students, but the academic and character development benefits – documented at all grade levels (Johnson & Johnson, 1989) – justify the effort.

7. The conscience of craft. The literature on moral and character education often treats moral learning and academic learning as separate spheres. But academic work and learning have moral meaning. Work is one of the most basic ways we develop self-discipline and self-worth and contribute to the human community. It is a mark of people's character when they take care to perform their jobs and other tasks

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well. Syracuse University professor Tom Green calls this a "conscience of craft" – the capacity to feel satisfaction at a job well done and to be ashamed of slovenly work (Green, 1985).

Teachers who effectively develop students' work-related character qualities typically combine high expectations and high support. For example: Anne Ritter is the kind of teacher who believes that every child can learn. As a new teacher in her school, she taught a class of first-graders, 85 percent of whom came from families below the poverty line. She astonished fellow teachers by getting 90 percent of her class up to grade level in reading and math. Her comment: "It's the job."

When I visited her classroom, a list of classroom rules was writ large and posted in the front. The first rule was: "Always do your best in everything." On the wall was a sign: A PERSON WILL SELF-DESTRUCT WITHOUT A GOAL. The "value of the month," featured on the class bulletin board, was AMBITION, defined as "hard work directed toward a worthwhile goal."

8. Ethical reflection. This strategy focuses on developing several qualities that make up the cognitive side of character: being morally alert; knowing the virtues and what they require of us in concrete situations; being able to take the perspective of others; being able to reason morally; being able to make thoughtful moral decisions; and having moral self-knowledge, including the capacity for self-criticism.

Especially important is teaching students what the virtues are, how their habitual practice will lead to a more fulfilling life, and how each of us must take responsibility for developing our own character. The psychologist Patricia Cronin has designed a junior high school curriculum for doing this. "In these times of moral relativism," she writes, "children must be taught that right and wrong do exist, that there are moral standards that have defined human society since the origins of mankind" (Cronin, 1995). The emphasis in Cronin's curriculum is on helping students increase their awareness of their own behavior – of how they treat themselves and others. Students are encouraged to set small daily goals for improvement in their practice of a particular virtue such as respect, cooperation, or generosity (e.g., to give help before it's asked, or to defend someone against negative gossip). At the end of the day, they self-assess and, if they choose, record their progress in a personal journal. This daily goal-setting is considered important for self-awareness and good habit formation.

9. Teaching conflict resolution. Teaching students how to resolve conflicts without force or intimidation is a vitally important part of character education for two reasons: (1) conflicts not settled fairly will prevent or erode a moral community in the classroom; and (2) without conflict resolution skills, students will be morally handicapped in their interpersonal relationships now and later in life, and may end up contributing to violence in school and society. There are a great many ways to teach conflict resolution skills in the classroom. Susan Skinner, a kindergarten teacher

at Heathwood Hall Episcopal School in Columbia, South Carolina, uses two methods she finds effective. When two children have a conflict, she stops the action and uses it as a teachable moment. She invites two other children (not the ones involved in the dispute) to come to the front of the class to role-play a positive solution to the conflict. She then asks the whole class for their suggestions. Finally, the two children who were involved in the conflict are invited to act out a positive solution that draws on what they have just seen and heard.

When one child has hurt another, teacher Skinner teaches a reconciliation ritual that fosters the virtue of forgiveness. She instructs the offending child to say, "I am sorry – will you pleases forgive me?" If the victim judges the apology sincere, that child is instructed to respond, "I do forgive you." These behavior patterns have the best chance of becoming part of a child's character when they are learned early and practiced often. But effective training is still possible at the adolescent level, where the stakes are even higher because conflicts may explode into deadly violence.

When teachers first learn about the current efforts in character education, they frequently ask, "What about parents? How can we get them to do their part?" The stories I shared about Brookside Elementary School and Jefferson Junior High School showed some ways to get parents involved and the benefits of doing so. I want to underscore the importance of sending home suggestions for character-building activities. Home-based activities can be parent-initiated (e.g., dinner discussion topics or bedtime stories) or child-initiated (e.g., school assignments where children interview their parents concerning their attitudes about drugs, their views on friendship, what values they were taught growing up, etc.).

One of the areas where cooperation between home and school is crucial is sex education. Currently, sex is the area of young people's lives where they often display the poorest character – the lowest levels of respect, responsibility, and self-control.

In a 1993 study by the American Association of Unversity Women, four of five high schools students – 85% of girls and 75% of boys – said they have experienced sexual harassment in school. Example: A boy backs a 14-year-old girl up against her locker, day after day. Comments Nan Stein, a Wellesley College researcher, "There's a Tailhook happening in every school. Egregious behavior is going on."

At an Indiana high school a teacher says, "The air is thick with sex talk. Kids in the halls will say – boy to girl, girl to boy – "I want to f— you."

At Lakewood High School in an affluent Los Angeles suburb, a group of high school boys formed a club called Spur Posse, in which participants competed to see how many girls they could sleep with. In a suburb

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of Pittsburgh, teachers discovered that sixth-grade boys were playing a sexual contact game; the object was to earn points by touching girls in private parts, the most points being earned by "going all the way."

It's no exaggeration to say that more young people are at risk from premature sexual activity than from any other single threat to their physical, emotional, and spiritual welfare. As a nation, according to a 1989 United Nations study, we have one of the highest teen pregnancy rates in the developed world and *the* highest teen abortion rate (about 400,000 a year). One-third of sexually active teen girls are infected with chlamydia (one of the leading causes of infertility) or human papilloma virus (the cause of nearly all cervical cancer) (Lickona, Lickona, & Boudreau, 1994).

As a culture, we are gradually emerging from the sexual revolution to recover the wisdom that sexual self-control is part of good character, that chastity is one of the virtues in the constellation of human virtues that serve the individual and common good. As the artist William Schickel has observed, "Chastity is a civic as well as a personal virtue. When a society loses chastity, it begins to destroy itself" (Schickel, 1991).

Currently, many schools, even those committed to educating for character, lack a consistent educational philosophy governing their approach to sex education. In most areas of school life, they are likely to be appropriately directive, guiding students to morally correct conclusions (it's wrong to lie, cheat, steal, be racist, etc.) as character education recommends. But when it comes to sex education, they send a mixed moral message: "Don't have sex, but here's how to practice safer sex." Schools say they have to teach kids how to use contraceptives because many students will have sex no matter how much the school stresses abstinence. But schools would never take this approach in drug education. Many students will continue to be drug-active even though the school teaches drug abstinence. Yet the school would never say, "If you decide to do drugs, here's how to practice safer drug use: Buy your stuff from someone you trust; don't mix drugs and alcohol; and get your clean needles from the school nurse."

Two groups, the Character Education Partnership (1996) and the Medical Institute for Sexual Health (MISH, 1993), have each recently articulated principles of "character-based sex education" to try to help schools apply character education principles to the sexual domain. Through ethical reasoning, medical evidence, and real-life stories, character-based sex education helps young people come to the following conclusions:

(1) Sexual abstinence is the *only* medially safe and morally responsible choice for unmarried teenagers. (Abstinence is defined as avoiding sexual intercourse, other genital contact, and any activities that put one at risk for engaging in genital contact.)

(2) Condoms do not make sex outside marriage physically safe (you can still get pregnant or catch a sexually transmitted disease), emotionally safe (yc can still get hurt), or ethically loving (can you clai to love somebody if you're gambling with th person's health and happiness?).

(3) The only truly safe sex is having sex only with a uninfected lifetime partner who is having sex onl with you. Avoiding sexual intercourse before ma riage is the best way to preserve your sexual healt and you're ability to have a baby.

(4) Premarital abstinence is a positive, practical, achiev able lifestyle that promotes self-control, self-re spect, respect for others, responsibility, maturity and good health.

(5) Premarital abstinence preserves sexual intimacy an the bond it creates for the commitment of marriage

(6) Young people who have been sexually active hav the ability to change – to choose abstinence an remain abstinent until marriage.

There are now a dozen different curricula that guide young people to these conclusions and help them develop the skills and strengths of character to live them out. For ar account of successful abstinence programs – like the ones used at Jefferson Junior High – I recommend the new paper back book, *The Power of Abstinence* (Avon, 1996), by the medical writer and abstinence educator Kris Napier.

I would like to close by returning to the question with which I opened my article: What is the role of religion in character education? I pointed out that public schools must find non-religious ways to define and teach good character. But students don't park their spiritual beliefs at the classroom door. For religious believers, their faith in God is the most powerful reason for leading a moral life. God is the ultimate moral authority – the giver of the Ten Commandments, not the ten suggestions. How can we recognize and build on students' religious beliefs and values without violating the First Amendment?

I would submit that schools can integrate religion into their character efforts in several ways that are educationally sound and constitutionally permissible.

1. They can help students understand the role religion has played in our moral beginnings and continuing moral development as a nation. Teachers can point out, for example, that the Declaration of Independence, which provides the moral framework for the Constitution, asserts that we are "endowed by our Creator with certain unalienable rights." It's because our human rights are God-given that the government can't take them away.

2. Schools can teach something else that is also historically true: Our country's social reform movements – from the abolition of slavery to the civil rights movement of the 60s to the current prolife effort to secure the right to live before birth as well as after – have all been inspired by a religious vision: that life is sacred, that we are all equal in the sight of God, that we are children of a common Creator who calls us to live in harmony and justice.

3. We can help students understand the role of reli-

gious motivation in the lives of individuals, both in history and in current times. Unfortunately, contemporary educational materials often leave this out. I recently received in the mail a copy of a book for middle schoolers on modern heroes. It included three pages on Mother Teresa, portraying her in a totally secular way as a kind of super social worker. There was not a single mention of her faith in God, or the personal call she felt from Christ to leave her high school teaching to found an order that would minister to "the poorest of the poor." Or the fact that she and her Sisters of Charity spend three hours of every day in prayer and experience God's love as the wellspring of their work. Clearly, students are profoundly misinformed and spiritually impoverished by such omissions and distortions of the historical truth.

4.   Finally, schools can encourage students to make use of all their intellectual and cultural resources – including their faith traditions – when they consider social issues (e.g., "What is my obligation to the poor?") and make personal moral decisions (e.g., "Should I have sex before marriage?"). A 1992 Gallup Poll found that 94% of American teenagers say they believe in a personal God who loves them. In a sex education class, one could cite that finding to teens and then say, "If you believe in God, certain questions logically follow when you're thinking about sex. One is, how does God intend for me to use the gift of my sexuality? And how can I find that out?" If students check out what their faith tradition teaches on this matter, they will find that God did not intend sex to be part of the relationships of unmarried teenagers. This would be a legitimate way for the school to draw upon religion as a support for abstinence.

When we consider the dimensions of the moral and spiritual crisis around us, when we observe the violence, lack of respect for life born and preborn, sexual decadence, worship of money, breakdown of the family, and loss of faith in something greater than ourselves, it's reasonable to wonder whether and to what extent an "educational movement" – let alone an individual teacher – can make a difference in problems so broad and deep. But many of us can remember a teacher who influenced our lives in an enduring way. The research on resilient children indicates that one significant adult – someone who bonds with a child and builds confidence, character, and hope – can help a child rise above adversities such as dysfunctional families, abuse, poverty, and war. The future of the character education movement rests on its ability to remind teachers and schools that they can have this kind of impact and to strengthen their skills for doing so. This is, and always has been, the school's highest calling.

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