THE JUBILEE CENTRE
FOR CHARACTER & VIRTUES

Insight Series

My 45-Year Journey as a Moral and Character Educator: Some of What I Think I've Learned

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In the spirit of the Jubilee Centre's focus on gratitude, I would like to begin with mine—first, to the Centre for undertaking this internationally important character project and second, for enabling Judith and me to spend this week with you learning more about it.

In this talk, I'd like to share briefly my 45-year journey as a moral and character educator and some of what I think I've learned along the way.

Piaget and the Moral Judgment of the Child

My lifelong interest in moral matters was very much influenced, I feel sure, by growing up in a Catholic home where morality and conscience were considered important. My academic interest in this area began when I was a doctoral student in psychology in the mid-1960s and read Piaget's 1932 book, *The Moral Judgment of the Child.* Einstein reportedly said that Piaget's genius was to ask children simple questions that nobody before had thought of asking them—questions like "What is a lie?" and "Where do rules come from?" I was inspired by Piaget's research to do my doctoral dissertation as an experimental test of his theory about why children mature in their moral thinking about these kinds of questions. In particular, I investigated, as Piaget had, the extent to which children take intentions into account when making moral judgments about culpability: "Who's naughtier—a boy who smashes one teacup on purpose in a fit of temper, or a boy who breaks 8 cups by accident while putting them away for his mom?"

I designed three experimental interventions with 6-year-olds that were intended to test Piaget's theory that children develop more mature moral judgment as a result of their growing cognitive ability to simultaneously hold in mind more than one relevant factor and as a result of their interactions with their social equals—other children. I designed a fourth, "non-Piagetian" intervention I called "didactic instruction," which consisted of my simply explaining to the child why one should consider intentions when judging who's naughtier. I considered this a non-Piagetian approach because Piaget took a dim view of the role of parents and other adults in children's moral development. He saw adult authority figures as the source of "a morality of constraint" rather than the developmentally more mature "morality of cooperation."

All four of my experimental conditions produced a significant shift in my 6-year-old subjects' thinking—toward greater sensitivity to intentions. That shift not only held up on a posttest a month later but also generalized to a different set of stories that asked them to assess the culpability of a

story character who told a deliberate lie vs. one who made a well-intentioned mistake. Contrary to the predictions I had derived from Piaget's theory—namely, that non-directive methods would be superior to directive ones in advancing children's moral thinking—the 6-year-olds who received direct, didactic instruction made the biggest gains on story items like the one about the broken cups *and* showed the greatest generalization of their new sensitivity to intentions when judging stories about lies.

What I learned from this early experience as a psychologist and moral educator is that there's no substitute for research to test our theoretical intuitions.   I also learned to be suspicious of the kind of educational "constructivism" that believes children have to construct, on their own, an understanding of the physical and social-moral world, and that sees no positive role for direct teaching or guidance by adults. Direct teaching can in fact stimulate cognitive moral development, as I found in my study. Two decades later, when I wrote *Educating for Character*, I tried to honor both direct moral teaching and indirect, experienced-based methods of character education and to show how effective teachers and schools make wise use of both.

Kohlberg's Stages of Moral Reasoning: Growing toward Principled Thinking

During my dissertation research on Piaget, a rising young star in the field of moral development, Lawrence Kohlberg, came to speak at our State University of New York at Albany. I was asked to drive him from our campus over to Russell Sage College, where he was to give another lecture. He asked about my work, I told him about my dissertation research on Piaget, and that began a friendship that lasted until his death in 1987.

Philosophically, Kohlberg's theory of moral stage development challenged the moral and cultural relativism that had dominated the social sciences. He argued that the stages of moral reasoning revealed by his longitudinal research represented a progression toward a more adequate, more fully universalized understanding of justice. As a Catholic, I was attracted to that. Psychologically, Kohlberg's research extended what Piaget had begun: It revealed the child as a moral thinker whose moral thinking was in the process of developing and whose development could be stimulated by perspective-taking opportunities. In Kohlberg's view, unlike Piaget's, those perspective-taking opportunities could be provided by parents and teachers as well as peers.

In 1970, I got a job at the State University of New York at Cortland directing a federally funded teacher education program called Project Change. The College was taking a chance hiring me, given the fact that I had had no formal training in education. My five years directing Project Change gave me my first opportunity to observe, interview, and learn from good teachers. That proved to be a formative experience.   It taught me to value the on-the-ground wisdom of practitioners—a source of wisdom I continued to draw on throughout my career.

I also began working with teachers on what they could do in the classroom to help children progress to higher stages of moral reasoning. Our first efforts were crude, using hypothetical moral dilemmas. Over time, we encouraged teachers to have their students discuss the real-life moral problems of the classroom. What should you do when somebody cuts ahead of you in line? Calls you a name? Bullies another kid?

At the same time, I was also very much interested in what parents could do to foster moral development in family life. By now, Judith and I had two boys, Mark and Matthew. I was curious to see whether their social-moral reasoning would follow the stages described by Piaget, Kohlberg, Robert Selman, William Damon, and other cognitive-developmentalists. I also wanted to learn, through my own fathering, what parents could do in the course of everyday family interactions to help children use their best available moral reasoning and also make progress toward the next stage of reasoning.

This led to writing a book for parents, *Raising Good Children: Helping Your Child Through the Stages of Moral Development* (1983). It described the six developmental stages of moral reasoning, illustrated with examples of how to talk the language of a child's current dominant stage and how to promote higher-level thinking. In an effort to provide a practical handbook for parents, I also drew on contemporary research on childrearing and the wisdom of the ages about raising kids. I interviewed experienced parents, asking them, How did your parents teach you good values and help you develop a good character? How are you trying to do that with your own children?

Let me illustrate the first several stages of moral reasoning. When our younger son Matthew was four years old, he protested "It's not fair!" whenever he couldn't get what he wanted, or when he had to do something he didn't want to do. This was a textbook example of the self-centered moral reasoning that characterizes what cognitive-developmental psychologists have called Stage 0. At this stage, children are beginning to see the world in terms of fairness, but they consider fairness from only one point of view—their own.

A year later, when Matthew was 5, he had moved on to Stage 1, the stage of unquestioning obedience. This became apparent when I asked him one day, "Why should children obey their parents?"

He replied, "Because children are the slaves of parents."

Trying to keep a straight face, I asked him, "Why do you say that children are the slaves of parents?"

"Because," he said with an air of resignation, "We have to obey your orders."

At Stage 1, kids think that what's right is to obey your parents, teachers, and other authority figures—whether you like it or not. In one sense, this is progress; Stage 1 thinkers have developed a primitive respect for adult authority. They believe that they *should* obey their parents and teachers. But if you ask a Stage 1 thinker *why* they should obey, the best reason they can come up with is, "You'll get punished if you don't."

That's a problem—because at Stage 1, when the adult authority is out of sight, the adult's rule is often out of mind. Because Stage 1 thinkers don't understand the moral reason behind the rule, the rule doesn't necessarily govern their behavior when adults aren't around. The limitations of Stage 1 thinking are evident from my interview with a 10-year-old boy named Hank. The principal of Hank's school asked me to interview him because Hank had repeatedly been caught stealing from other students' lockers.

"Hank," I said, "tell me—do you think stealing is right or wrong?"

"Wrong," he said without hesitating. He obviously knew the rule against stealing.

"Why do you think it's wrong?" I asked.

"Because the principal might catch you, and you'd get in trouble."

"Okay, the principal might catch you . . . Can you think of *another* reason why stealing is wrong?"

"Yeah, if the cops caught you, you'd have to go to jail."

"Okay . . . can you think of any other reasons why stealing is wrong?"

"Yeah, if you're old man found out, you'd get a whippin' when you got home."

What do you notice about all three of Hank's reasons for not stealing? They are all focused on punishment—all Stage 1 thinking. Whose point of view is Hank focusing on when he thinks about stealing? The viewpoint of adult authority figures who have the power to punish him if they catch him stealing. Whose viewpoint is he completely failing to consider? The viewpoint of the victims of his thefts—the kids whose lockers he was stealing from.

Hank, at age 10, was still stuck in Stage 1. Most kids his age can think of more developmentally mature reasons for not stealing, such as, "It's not fair to steal other people's stuff—you wouldn't want them to steal from you" (Stage 2).

Hank's comment that "you'd get a whippin' when you got home" gives us a clue about the home life that was probably responsible for his slow moral development and stealing. It sounds as if his father often responded to Hank's wrongdoing with physical punishment. What Hank needed from his parents was moral reasoning that would help him understand how his behavior affected other people.

Raising Good Children proposed that our long-range goal as parents and educators should be to help young people reach the highest developmental stage, Stage 5, the stage of principled moral reasoning. At Stage 5, a person thinks, "I should show the greatest possible respect for the rights and dignity of every person—and support a social system that protects human rights." In Kohlberg's 20-year longitudinal study, only 15% of his sample reached this highest level.

An example of the importance of Stage 5 thinking comes from the Vietnam War. Late in that war, the U. S. military suspected the Vietnamese village of My Lai of being one of the places providing shelter for members of the Viet Cong insurgents. Acting on what he understood to be his orders to "destroy the enemy," the U.S. officer Lt. William Calley lined up all the My Lai villagers in a ditch and ordered his troops to shoot them. In a matter of seconds, hundreds of men, women, and children were dead in the worst known massacre of the war.

There was one soldier, Michael Bernhardt, who disobeyed the order to shoot.   Here is the reasoning he used to explain his actions when he was interviewed after the My Lai incident:

I can hardly do anything if I know it's wrong. The law is only the law, and many times it's wrong. It's not necessarily just, simply because it's the law. My kind of citizen would be guided by his own laws. These would be more strict, in a lot of cases, than the actual laws.

This is Stage 5 principled thinking. Bernhardt is saying that just because something is approved by the system or ordered by authority doesn't make it right. There is a higher law to which we are all accountable, namely, the moral law—in this case, the principle of respect for human life.

Similarly, in Stanley Milgram's famous study of obedience, four of the six subjects who scored at the principled stage of moral reasoning—when faced with an experimenter's instructions to continue giving what they believed were increasingly severe electrical shocks to a screaming victim—quit the experiment. Said one woman who refused to continue: "No, I don't think we have to go on. We are here of our own free will."

From my study of stages of moral development, I learned to think of education as having the goal of promoting human development to higher levels of maturity. The capacity for principled moral reasoning is an important part of what it means to be a mature human being. It's also a prerequisite for being a responsible citizen committed to safeguarding basic human rights and advancing the common good in a democratic society.

The Just Community Approach: Beyond Moral Reasoning

The capacity for higher moral reasoning, however, doesn't necessarily guarantee high-level moral behavior. That became clear from studies by Kohlberg and colleagues showing that stage of moral reasoning interacted with other factors, such as "ego strength" and environmental circumstances, to influence how people actually behaved in particular situations.

Evidence that moral reasoning doesn't ensure moral behavior led Kohlberg in the 1970s to launch a series of "just community" projects—first in New England prisons and later in high schools. In 1977, I was able to visit one of the women's prisons where the just community approach was being implemented. The just community gave these women a larger voice in their lives, a greater sense of their dignity, more meaningful work, the opportunity to support and counsel peers, and the experience of being accountable to group norms of fairness, trust, and mutual support. This was a deliberate effort to create a positive and powerful moral culture, one that provided many of the

perspective-taking opportunities needed for growth in moral reasoning but that also made positive use of accountability to the group—a kind of "applied sociology" that Kohlberg said he learned from his time on the Israeli kibbutz.

In the women's prisons, the just community intervention had the remarkable effect of reducing the recidivism rate by half. In the several high schools where it was tried, the just community produced gains in individual students' moral reasoning as well as gains on a newly developed measure of "moral atmosphere," the moral stage of the group as manifested by the reasoning students used in community meetings.

In both prisons and schools, the just community gave participants a first-hand experience of justice and democracy and lots of practice in being responsible community members. In a very real sense, providing practice in behaving responsibly as a community member was an application of Aristotelian wisdom: "Virtues are not mere thoughts but habits we develop by performing virtuous actions." In effect, Kohlberg had gone beyond Plato's emphasis on knowing the good to Aristotle's emphasis on doing it.

The spirit of the just community model—together with William Glasser's work on democratic class meetings (*Schools Without Failure*), John Dewey's writing on democracy (*Democracy and Education*), and my own deep belief that collaborative problem-solving is inherently respectful of people and an effective way to run a classroom and school—led me to include "a democratic classroom environment" and "participatory student government" as important parts of a comprehensive approach to character education. Unfortunately, despite our efforts to promote classroom and school experiences of democracy, they remain vastly underused by schools.

A Comprehensive Concept of Character and a Comprehensive Approach to Character Education

In the mid-1980s, I had the opportunity to work with a group of philosophers (including some virtue ethicists), psychologists, and educators at the Catholic University of America. Our interdisciplinary project sought to develop an "integrated view of the human person" and an integrated approach to moral and character education. In this broader vision, moral reasoning was still important, but it was increasingly clear that there is much more to being a moral person than moral reasoning. Being a good person requires good character. It requires virtues in the sense that Aristotle spoke of them, settled dispositions to behave in morally good ways.

In *Character Development in Schools and Beyond*, one of three edited books that emerged from the Catholic University project, Kevin Ryan and I defined character as having three psychological components: thinking, feeling, and behavior. Good character, we argued, is *knowing the good*, *loving the good*, and *doing the good*. Head, heart, and hand. Character in this full sense was the goal of character education. Defining "the good" led to a focus on virtues as providing the content of good character. Later, in *Character Matters* (2004), I proposed wisdom, justice, fortitude, self-control, love, a positive attitude, hard work, integrity, gratitude, and humility as "ten essential virtues" affirmed by nearly all philosophical, cultural, and religious traditions.

Let me share a true story about a 9-year-old boy named Billy that illustrates how a school can develop character in its cognitive, emotional, and behavioral dimensions. At his small rural school, Billy got into fights nearly every day. He was uncooperative in the classroom and did little schoolwork. His father was in prison. His mother was an alcoholic. Billy himself, at the age of 9, was already beginning to use alcohol in times of stress. In workshops I ask teachers, how would you try to help Billy stop fighting in school, *and* develop his character—his self-control, empathy, sense of responsibility, and willingness to do his schoolwork?

Billy's 4th-grade teacher and the school counselor offered him the opportunity to be the special friend of a 6-year-old boy in a wheel chair. He could help this boy on and off the school bus every day. He could visit him for a short time in the morning and again in the afternoon to help him with his schoolwork. He could eat with him at lunchtime and be his special protector on the playground. There was one condition, however. If Billy he got into any kind of a fight at school, he lost the privilege of further contact with this 6-year-old boy for the rest of that day. The next day was a new start.

Billy and the first-grade boy became fast friends. His little buddy greatly looked forward to their times together. Billy's fighting declined sharply because he didn't want to lose this privilege. He developed a more positive attitude toward his schoolwork. One day, when Billy's teacher told him that his little friend was absent from school because he was sick, she saw a tear in Billy's eye—something she had never before observed. Billy was learning to care by giving care. His 1st-grade friend was depending on him. In his new social role, Billy felt needed, competent, and important. He grew in responsibility because he had been given responsibility. The responsibility he had for his young friend had engaged and developed all three parts of his character: head, heart, and hand.

It became clear that developing character in this comprehensive, multi-dimensional sense required a comprehensive approach—one that would provide students with many authentic, character-building experiences like the one Billy had. Such an approach would give students opportunities throughout the school day to develop an understanding of what's right, the desire to do what's right, and the habits of actually doing the right thing—habits that would come from repeated practice.

A comprehensive approach to character education would need to make deliberate use of every phase of classroom and school life: the example of adults, the relationships among peers, the handling of rules and discipline, the resolution of conflicts, the content of the curriculum, the pursuit of excellence in academic work, the commitment to character in co-curricular activities, and the promotion of good character in every part of the school environment. In this approach, every moment of the school day would be seen as a "character moment" with the potential to influence a child's character, for good or for ill.

Educating for Character

In 1985, I had a half-year sabbatical leave. I was able to travel across the United States and Canada and visit schools that had a reputation for doing good work in character education. The observations and interviews I did during this sabbatical, combined with what I had been collecting from 15 years of previous work with teachers, enabled me to identify and illustrate 12 components

of a comprehensive approach to character education: 9 components that defined the life of the classroom, and 3 that defined the total school environment and the partnership with parents (see the "wheel" Figure on the next page).

It took me the next five years to write *Educating for Character*, published in 1991. If you have had to chance to look at it, you will see on every page why I feel an enormous debt of gratitude to good practitioners—teachers and school leaders who demonstrate, concretely, how character education can be done well in the everyday life of schools. Each of the 12 components is also supported by empirical research—studies showing the importance of good teacher-student relationships, the power of positive peer relations, the effectiveness of discipline that helps students understand and follow rules, the impact of involving students in democratic problem-solving, the benefits of well-designed cooperative learning, etc.

The Center for the 4th and 5th Rs

In fall of 1994, with the help of two small foundation grants, we established our College's Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility). We began to train educators in our 12-point comprehensive approach. We did that primarily through our Summer Institute, a 3-5 day conference that gave participants opportunities to hear from national experts on character education and from principals and teachers who were having some success in their character education efforts. We recruited Institute participants in school teams and gave them time during the Institute to develop an implementation plan. Their mission when they went back home was to serve as the leadership team for implementing their plan.
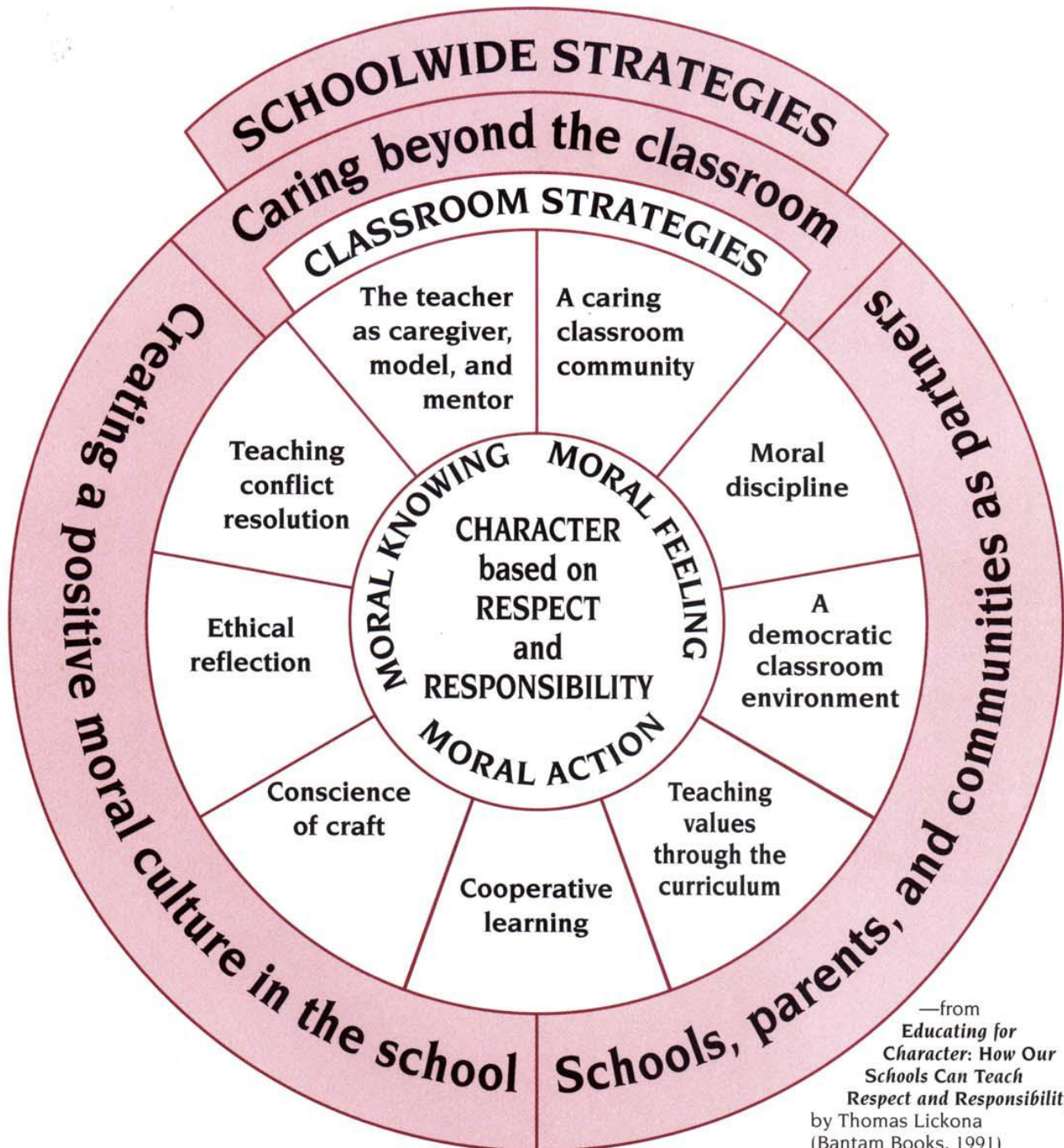
In the 15 consecutive years we offered our Summer Institute, it attracted over 5,000 participants from 41 states and 20 countries. At the end of the Institute, participants typically said they were more convinced than ever about the importance of character education and "inspired" by what they had heard. But we soon learned a number of hard lessons about the shortcomings of our approach.

A 3-5 day conference could inspire people about the vision but didn't equip them to implement it. On the evaluations, many participants said they felt "overwhelmed." Moreover, we didn't teach them realistic strategies for bringing about school change. When some of these teams returned the following summer, they told us, "We left here last year on fire about character education, but we couldn't get the rest of the faculty on board."

We found that the Institute was more effective when we were able to follow up with an on-site training—even an afternoon workshop—that directly exposed a school's full faculty to the comprehensive model. And it helped a great deal if the principal sent successive teams of teachers to the Summer Institute until everyone on the faculty had been there. We also began to recommend that schools divide the labor of implementation and broaden staff involvement by creating multiple leadership committees, each responsible for leading a different aspect of its character education initiative. One elementary school, for example, formed three character education committees: one tasked with supplying faculty colleagues with ideas for teaching the target virtues through academic subjects, another in charge of informing and involving parents, and a third responsible for assessing the impact of their character effort, using a survey our Center had developed (School as a Caring Community Profile, www.cortland.edu/character).

THE CENTER FOR THE 4ᵀᴴ AND 5ᵀᴴ Rs promotes a **12-point comprehensive approach to character education**, one that uses all aspects of school life as deliberate opportunities for character development. The inner part of the wheel below shows *nine character-building strategies for the classroom*; the outer rim, *three schoolwide strategies*.

THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO CHARACTER EDUCATION

SCHOOLWIDE STRATEGIES

Caring beyond the classroom

Creating a positive moral culture in the school

Schools, parents, and communities as partners

CLASSROOM STRATEGIES

The teacher as caregiver, model, and mentor

A caring classroom community

Teaching conflict resolution

Moral discipline

Ethical reflection

A democratic classroom environment

Conscience of craft

Teaching values through the curriculum

Cooperative learning

MORAL KNOWING · MORAL FEELING · MORAL ACTION

CHARACTER based on RESPECT and RESPONSIBILITY

—from
Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility
by Thomas Lickona
(Bantam Books, 1991)

A SCHOOL COMMITTED TO CHARACTER EDUCATION publicly stands for core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, and caring; defines them in terms of behaviors that can be observed in school life; models these values; studies them; celebrates their manifestations; and holds all school members accountable to standards of conduct consistent with the core values.

Educating for Character in the Sexual Domain

The 1980s—faced with rising teenage sexual activity, one of the many consequences of the sexual revolution that began in the 60s and 70s—saw the beginning of the abstinence education movement in the United States. It got a major boost in 1995 when the U.S. Congress began to provide federal grants for abstinence education projects. My book *Educating for Character* and our Center's Summer Institute and newsletter had been promoting what we called "character-based sex education." We saw abstinence education as a natural ally of the character education movement. It helped teens apply, to the critically important sexual area of their lives, virtues such as self-control, genuine respect and responsibility for self and others, and the courage to do the right thing in the face of temptation and pressure.

Sex is delicate territory. Many character educators have avoided it out of fear of jeopardizing the broader character education effort. Not to deal with this issue, however, is to ignore the elephant in the room. In our hypersexualized society, sex is everywhere. For all teenagers, understanding their sexuality and making wise sexual decisions is a key developmental task. In this vulnerable area of their lives, many young people make mistakes that harm themselves, others, and society. In the U.S., although teen pregnancy and births are down from the 1990s, three of 10 teenage girls still get pregnant at least once. About 30% get abortions. One in four teenagers has a sexually transmitted disease. Teen sex is associated with lower self-esteem, higher rates of depression, and higher rates of dating violence. Fatherless families are one of the leading predictors of childhood and adolescent pathology.

Abstinence education offered an alternative to the kind of sex education that focused on teaching students to practice "safe sex" by using a condom. Safe sex education was eventually renamed "safer sex" education and ultimately "risk reduction" because the research was showing that significant risks remained despite condom use. For teens, condom failure in preventing pregnancy went as high as 30%. Many STDs could be transmitted by skin-to-skin contact in areas not covered by a condom. And condoms provided no protection against the psychological repercussions of sex. The journal *Pediatrics* reported that the attempted suicide rate for sexually experienced 12-to-16 year-old girls was 6 times higher than for virgins. Rather than risk reduction, abstinence education advocated risk avoidance. It encouraged teenagers, out of respect for self and others, to avoid all of the dangers of sexually transmitted disease, out-of-wedlock pregnancy, single parenthood, and emotional hurt associated with uncommitted sexual relationships.

In the early 1990s, my wife Judith and I were invited to speak to groups of teens and parents on the benefits of saving "the ultimate human intimacy for the ultimate human commitment," historically known as marriage. We eventually wrote a book for teenagers, *Sex, Love, and You* (1994), and our Center subsequently published an issue of our newsletter, "10 Emotional Dangers of Premature Sexual Involvement," based on a well-received chapter from that book. The psychological aftermath of temporary sexual relationships had been a neglected area in sex education. Naming the emotional consequences of sexual activity—and illustrating them with true stories from the lives of teens—touched a responsive chord among students, educators, and parents and found resonance across the ideological spectrum. For a discussion of the characteristics of well-designed abstinence education programs that have empirical support, see our interview of Dr. Stan Weed, the leading researcher in this area, in the 2014 issue of our Center's *excellence & ethics* education letter (www.cortland.edu/character).

Smart & Good High Schools: The Integration of Excellence and Ethics

In 2003, our Center received a grant from the John Templeton Foundation to study award-winning American high schools. The character education movement in the United States had been strongest at the elementary school level (ages 5-10), less evident at the middle school level (ages 11-13), and least present at the high school level (ages 14-18)—even though high school is the age when students arguably are at greatest risk for making mistakes that can have harmful long-term consequences. Moreover, if we don't work on creating schools of character at the high school level, all the hard work to foster character development in the younger years can be undone. Here, for example, is a mother whose son goes to an expensive private high school in the Midwest:

> There are many problems at the high school. Besides drinking—and there's a lot of that—there's a tremendous amount of stealing. Kids wear ratty sneakers to school because they might be stolen. It seems as if any time you go to get a book out of the library, it's been stolen. The teachers at the high school seem to care about the kids, but students don't seem to pick up on their example. They feel you're just responsible for yourself. And these are kids who come out of wonderful, warm, caring elementary schools where students appear to be learning kindness and respect for others. But then they go to high school and seem to lose it all.

Why does this happen? In most high schools, character education gets scant attention. Many express what we came to call the "character education dilemma": "We think character education is important and we'd like to do more, but because of academic pressures, we just don't have the time." Ultimately, the success of the character education movement will depend on our ability to help schools solve this dilemma.

My colleague Matthew Davidson and I wanted to know: What were the best high schools in the country doing to develop good character, even if they didn't call it "character education"? To find out, we made site visits to 24 award-winning high schools—big and small, public and private, in every region of the country. We identified more than 100 promising practices that we described in a 250-page report titled *Smart & Good High Schools* (www.cortland.edu/character).

Our study of high schools caused a paradigm shift in our thinking about character and character education. As we observed these schools going about their work, it became increasingly clear that that character education isn't just about helping students become kind, honest, and fair. It's also about teaching them to work hard, develop their talents, and strive for excellence so that they are equipped to make a positive difference in the world.

We therefore broadened our concept of character to include both *performance character* and *moral character*. We defined performance character as consisting of all those qualities—such as hard work, perseverance, confidence, and creativity—that enable us to achieve our highest potential in any performance environment, whether the classroom, the playing field, or the workplace. We defined moral character as consisting of all those qualities—such as honesty, justice, love, and humility—that enable us to be our best ethical selves in our human relationships and our roles as citizens.

In this expanded vision, to become a person of character is to become the best person we can be.   A life of character integrates ethics and excellence. Moral character motivates us to want to do good. Performance character enables us to get the job done.

Attention to performance character gives achievement a moral purpose: We develop our talents in order to contribute to society. Attention to performance character recognizes the moral importance of good work.   The quality of 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 observes, "All life must be worked at, protected, planted, replanted, fashioned, cooked for, coaxed, diapered, formed, sustained. Work is the way we tend the world."

We further defined performance character and moral character in terms of 8 strengths of character. We proposed these, in the spirit of positive psychology, as broad "psychological assets"—each comprised of specific virtues and character skills—that are needed for a flourishing life. They include being (1) a critical thinker; (2) a diligent and capable performer; (3) a socially and emotionally skilled person; (4) an ethical thinker; (5) a respectful and responsible moral agent committed to moral action; (6) a self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle; (7) a contributing community member and democratic citizen; and (8) a spiritual person engaged in crafting a life of noble purpose. These eight strengths of character were our best answer to the question, "What does it mean to be a complete human being?"

Character education understood in this way encompassed the entire mission of a school. Character education became the process of developing performance character, moral character, and the 8 strengths of character within an ethical learning community—a partnership of staff, students, and parents.

Although the Smart & Good Schools conceptual framework—moral and performance character, the 8 strengths, and the ethical learning community—emerged from our study of high schools, we learned from middle schools and elementary schools that they also found it helpful in their character education work. We now use the Smart & Good framework, in conjunction with the 12 components of the comprehensive approach, at all developmental levels, K-12.

An Unexpected Outcome

We saw the new Smart & Good framework as good for the field of character education—especially in gaining traction at the secondary level.   We did not anticipate the problems around the corner.

The Character Education Partnership had given our Center a modest grant to help with the dissemination of the *Smart & Good High Schools* report and was listed as a co-publisher. But when we subsequently proposed to CEP's Board—I was a member at the time—that it integrate the new view of moral and performance character into its mission statement and its 11 Principles of Effective Character Education, our proposal met with resistance. Eric Schaps, president of the Developmental Studies Center, expressed a concern shared by others: that given the national obsession with test

scores, the introduction of "performance character" as a goal of character education ran the risk of pushing moral character to the sidelines.

We confidently argued that moral and performance character are interdependent, both necessary for a life of character, a point we felt we were making abundantly clear in our writing and speaking. Without moral character, we took pains to emphasize, we can easily fall into using unethical means to achieve our performance goals. Bernie Madoff was a hard worker, but because he had no integrity, he created financial ruin for hundreds of people who trusted him with their money. Similarly, if we have moral character without performance character, we will have difficulty developing our human potential and enacting our moral values effectively. We pointed out that studies of character exemplars, such as Anne Colby and William Damon's *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment* (1998), revealed strong moral character and strong performance character working synergistically to account for exemplars' contributions to fields as varied as human rights, education, business, philanthropy, the environment, and religion.

We prevailed; CEP accepted our argument. I then took the lead in working with its Education Advisory Council to produce a CEP position paper, *Performance Values: Why They Matter and What Schools Can Do to Foster Their Development* (2008). It stated:

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

Crystal clear, right? So we thought. But we were to eat humble pie. Eric Schaps's fears were justified. What we had written about the necessity and interdependence of moral and performance character was soon misrepresented. One prominent example is the best-selling book, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* by the *New York Times* journalist and education writer Paul Tough.

Tough's book touted the new psychology of character set forth in the landmark 2004 psychological volume, *Character Strengths and Virtues,* by Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman, founder of positive psychology. That book described 24 character strengths, but Peterson later whittled it down to seven: grit, self-control, zest, social intelligence, gratitude, optimism, and curiosity. After their colleague Angela Duckworth developed her 12-item Grit Scale, grit got most of the attention from educators and the media. The Grit Scale included agree-disagree items such as, "Setbacks don't discourage me," "I am a hard worker," and "I finish whatever I begin," and predicted performance on a variety of real-life tasks. College students with low entering college boards scores but high grit scores went on to achieve high GPAs. At the National Spelling Bee, kids with high grit scores were more likely to make it to the final rounds. At West Point military academy, high grit scores predicted which cadets survived the grueling summer training course.

In *How Children Succeed*, Tough contrasted the previous character education program ("CARE") of a prestigious private school (Riverdale Country School)—with its emphasis on "being aware of the feelings of others" and "treating everyone with respect"—with the school's new

character education emphasis on positive psychology virtues like grit. In so doing, Tough misrepresented our CEP position paper on performance character by incorrectly claiming that the paper "divided character education programs into two categories"—one focused on moral character, the other on performance character. In fact, the CEP paper had stressed that moral and performance character are "mutually supportive" and "both necessary to achieve the goals for which all schools of character strive." Here, however, is what Tough's book said:

> The character-strength approach of Seligman and Peterson isn't an expansion of programs like CARE; if anything it's a repudiation of them. In 2008, a national organization called the Character Education Partnership published a paper that divided character education programs into two categories: programs that develop "moral character," which embodies ethical values like fairness, generosity, and integrity; and those that address "performance character," which includes values like effort, diligence, and perseverance. The CARE program falls firmly on the "moral character" side of the divide, but the seven strengths that Randolph [Riverdale's headmaster] and Levin [head of the KIPP schools] chose for their schools leaned much more heavily toward performance character . . . (p. 78).

The above passage may be accurate in describing Riverdale school's shift toward performance virtues and away from moral virtues, but it's misleading to the extent that it suggests that CEP's position paper conferred legitimacy on separating the virtues in this way ("There are two kinds of character education programs out there, folks: moral character programs and performance character programs. Take your pick").

A few weeks ago, I received an email from a teacher at a private New York City high school that wanted help with professional development as it prepared for a year-long emphasis on respect. She said, however, that in focusing on qualities such as respect and integrity, her school appeared to be the exception, noting that "many character education programs seem focused on grit, determination, etc."

Lesson learned? Don't underestimate the culture's preoccupation with achievement and the difficulty of promoting an integrated approach to developing moral and performance character. We remain convinced that the integration of ethics and excellence is the right goal for character education, but are humbler and wiser about the challenges involved.

The Primacy of Parents

The character education movement has always, in principle, recognized that parents are the first and most important character educators of their children. Decades of research on childrearing show the impact of parents on every aspect of a child's development. Logically, schools should make recruiting parents as character education partners one of their highest priorities. But most schools don't do this. They think mostly about what they can do at school to create an environment of character that will foster good character. They would be wiser to invest much more energy, at the outset, into supporting and helping parents.

When I wrote *Educating for Character*, there was a little bit in the beginning about how schools need help from home, but not until the last chapter did I describe what parents might do to help. A decade of working with schools taught us to give the role of parents greater prominence. When I published *Character Matters* in 2004, I put the part about parents in the front. Nearly the

first third of the book describes 11 principles of raising children of character, 20 ways to strengthen the partnership between school and home, and what that partnership looks like when it comes to helping kids apply the character message to sex.

Most recently, I've come to believe that attention to the importance of parenting has to include attention to healthy family formation—preparing young people to understand what parenting involves and to realize that children are most likely to thrive when there are two parents committed to each other and to raising the children that their relationship may bring into the world.

High school courses on marriage and parenting, for example, have made use of the University of Virginia's National Marriage Project (www.virginia.edu/marriageproject/). There students can find research-based recommendations such as: "(1) *Consider making marriage a top goal for your life.* Married people are healthier, wealthier, and happier. (2) *Wait to have a child until after you are married and at least 20 years old.* The children of unwed parents face greater risks of depression, drug abuse, dropping out of school, juvenile delinquency, teen pregnancy, being poor, and committing suicide. (3) *Think twice before you decide to live with someone outside of marriage.* Living together before marriage is linked to a less satisfying marriage and a higher chance of divorce."

Well, those are some of the things I think I've learned during the 45 years I've been privileged to work in this field.   Education is the primary way society renews itself, and educating for character is our best hope of doing that. All of us who labor in these vineyards are grateful to have the Jubilee Centre as a partner in expanding our understanding of how to help people of all ages lead lives of virtue.

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