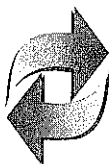


# ISSUE 6



## Should Character Education Define the Values We Teach Students?

**YES:** Merle J. Schwartz, Alexandra Beatty, and Eileen Dachnowicz, from "Character Education: Frill or Foundation?" *Principal Leadership* (December, 2006)

**NO:** Pamela Bolotin Joseph and Sara Efron, from "Seven Worlds of Moral Education," *Phi Delta Kappan* (March, 2005)

### ISSUE SUMMARY

**YES:** Merle J. Schwartz, Alexandra Beatty, and Ellen Dachnowicz, who are all affiliated with Character Education Partnership in Washington, DC, argue that identifying and teaching core values such as civic engagement and virtue can improve academic performance, school climate, and individual character.

**NO:** Pamela Bolotin Joseph, a faculty member at Antioch University, and Sara Efron, a faculty member at National-Louis University, argue for a broader moral curriculum, one that goes beyond character education to include cultural competence and a commitment to peace, justice, and social action.

**U.S.** society is in a state of moral decay, or so say many government officials, politicians, and religious leaders. And, indeed, there are many alarming trends reflecting a tendency of citizens to harm or devalue themselves and others. Crime, violence, and high-risk behaviors (e.g., drug and alcohol abuse) are more common today than they were a few decades ago. In the past, concerns about the moral state of society typically led to a renewed interest in—and dedication to—society's children, who were seen as the hope for the future. What is unique about today's disintegration of the social order is that many of the crimes, acts of violence, and problem behaviors of greatest concern are those perpetrated by children and youth. Perhaps even more startling are the acts of violence committed by children against other children *at school*. In addition to the acts of violence, many social commentators point with concern and outrage to increases in teenage pregnancy, drug and alcohol abuse, gambling, and other problem activities. It often seems that every new

report disseminated by the media suggests that children are engaging in risky or criminal behaviors at younger and younger ages.

Many social critics have argued that the solution to this problem is to teach morality, or values in school. These critics suggest that schools rather than families must be the source of moral education because the American family is itself in disarray. As evidence that many families are poorly prepared to conduct the requisite moral education, critics point to the increasing divorce rate, the fact that the majority of American children live for at least some part of their lives in a single-parent home, and the decline in the amount of time that parents spend with their children. In fact, many believe that this so-called disintegration of the American family is largely responsible for what they see as the dismal moral state of today's youth.

Calls for the inclusion of a moral agenda in the school curriculum harken back to the early history of education in the United States. Prior to the twentieth century, moral education, which often took the form of inculcating a system of values and beliefs reflective of a particular religious ideology, was commonplace. In fact, the Bible was often the primary textbook not only for the curriculum of values but also for the more strictly academic curriculum. It was not until recently that the debate about the separation of church and state led to a more secular and, some would say, less moral curriculum. This movement away from explicit instruction in religiously derived morality was greatly hastened in the 1960s and 1970s by a rejection of "traditional" values and authority and an increased emphasis on personal freedom and autonomy. In more recent years, the increasing cultural diversity of U.S. schools has facilitated the adoption of moral relativism, a belief that there are differences across cultures (and perhaps even between individuals within a culture) with regard to the systems of values held and that all those systems should be seen as equally valid and moral.

Should schools once again incorporate morality into their agendas? What should this moral curriculum look like? Whose values should it reflect? Have American schools really stopped teaching moral values, or have they simply been teaching values that are at odds with the values held by those who call for a return to morality? These are some of the questions that shape the debate reflected in the following selections. In the first selection, Merle Schwartz, Alexandra Beatty, and Eileen Dachnowicz describe several successful character education programs that not only inculcated specific moral traits and values in students but also improved academic performance. These programs stress the use of role models of, and reinforcement for, engaging in specific behaviors thought to be critical for the functioning of a democratic society such as ours. In the second selection, Pamela Bolotin Joseph and Sara Efron argue that the traits and behaviors at the center of character education represent only one possible instantiation of moral education. Joseph and Efron suggest that equally important as the values of moral education are behaviors and modes of thought derived from non-mainstream or non-U.S. cultures, an ethic of caring and nurturing, an orientation toward peace, an inclination toward social action, and a commitment to justice and ethical inquiry.

## Character Education: Frill or Foundation?

**A**ccountability. The word resounds in states, districts, and schools as educational programs come under close scrutiny. Proof of academic performance often serves as the litmus test for maintaining instructional practices and programs. Just as the national focus on academic improvement has gained momentum, so too has another movement calling for character education. Educators find themselves caught in the middle, questioning whether character education is just another passing fad or a valid educational initiative that will positively affect student performance as well as attitude.

Although character education has gained momentum at the elementary school level and has made considerable strides in middle level schools, high school faculties are still less than enthusiastic about adopting it. It is easy to see how some teachers, long exhausted from serving as the custodians of the prevailing education fashion, look skeptically at this movement. Faced with the formidable challenge of high-stakes testing, they wonder how they can prepare their students for state standardized tests as well as the SAT and AP exams and still find time to accent ethical qualities. Some teachers may listen wistfully to success stories in which character education has transformed school culture. Many can easily point out that a lack of ethical values seems to be the root of many of the problems in schools.

### What Does Science Say?

The Character Education Partnership (CEP), a national advocacy group for character education in Washington, DC, aims to help educators and policymakers make informed decisions about character education by identifying and describing strategies that work. Each year for the past nine years, CEP has recognized approximately 10 elementary and secondary schools as National Schools of Character because of their exemplary implementation of character education. Through reading thousands of applications and visiting more than 180 award-winning schools, CEP has collected a wealth of effective strategies and also observed a correlation between the effective implementation of character education and improved school culture and academic advancement.

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Interviews and record reviews of middle level and high school award winners showed that character education had positive effects on discipline, student and faculty member morale, and student performance. For example, Kennedy Middle School in Eugene, OR, showed a 15% improvement in meeting or exceeding the state's academic benchmarks and a 65% decrease in discipline referrals. Halifax (PA) Middle School reported not only the elimination of vandalism but also a total change in student attitude toward academic success. In addition to improved disciplinary statistics, high school winners—such as South Carroll High School in Sykesville, MD, and Cranford (NJ) High School—have reported a steady increase in their SAT averages. Site visitors observed that school size and geographical location did not appear to be the contributing factor to the school's success. Eleanor Roosevelt High School in Greenbelt, MD, which has nearly 3,000 students, and private New Hampton (NH) School, which has 325, have benefited from character education.

The outcomes of character education, however, are difficult to measure. Most studies either have referred to the results of specific commercial programs or have relied heavily on anecdotal accounts. But two recent studies of character education programs, funded largely by the John Templeton Foundation, provide evidence of their effectiveness—and describe strategies that will help middle level and high school educators who want to initiate or improve character education in their schools.

These data-driven studies approach character education scientifically from two different perspectives. The first explores the character education initiatives in 24 high schools that have received recognition for excellence; the second study examines 69 research studies on 33 specific character education programs to provide empirical evidence of what works in character education. The two studies fit together like pieces of a puzzle to confirm what many have long argued: effective character education not only improves school climate and student behavior but also can lead to academic improvement.

### What Is Character Education?

The phrase *character education* does not refer to a single approach or even a single list of the values that are taught in character education programs. *Character education* is often the umbrella term that describes concerted efforts to teach a number of qualities, such as civic virtues, respect and responsibility, social and emotional learning, empathy and caring, tolerance for diversity, and service to the community. Citizens need training in each of these areas to develop the moral and ethical stamina that enables them to contribute positively to a democratic society. Because a democratic society depends on a citizenry that shares such values as justice, fairness, responsibility, and caring, many believe that it is the obligation of schools, both public and private, to teach such values.

Lickona and Davidson (2005) point out that strength of character is necessary for the development of civic character: "Becoming a person of civic character, for example, requires the development of ethical thinking, moral agency, and a battery of social and emotional skills" (p. 178). Individual research on

character and civic education adds additional characteristics to the definition of *character*. In emphasizing the role of living in an increasingly globalized economy, Nordgren (2002) exhorts schools to foster highly effective teamwork and shared decision making because people's lives are intertwined in a shrinking world.

Although some schools and districts choose commercial programs so staff members and families will be on the same page as far as language and goals are concerned, many schools have developed homegrown programs that address their students' specific needs. Some are comprehensive, and others are a compilation of books, Web sites, and other resources that educators can mine for ideas.

All character education programs share the following goals:

- Increasing students' awareness of moral and ethical questions
- Affecting students' attitudes regarding such questions
- Affecting students' actions.

Some programs target specific behaviors—they aim to reduce rates of disciplinary action, cheating, teen pregnancy, drug use, and the like. Others may aim to promote positive behaviors, such as community involvement and civic participation. Still others focus on developing skills or fostering complex thinking about ethical issues—and many incorporate multiple goals.

The boundaries of character education are imprecise. These goals overlap with those for other efforts, such as civic education programs and service-learning programs. By 2002, however, roughly three-fourths of the states were actively encouraging their versions of character education; 14 states mandated some form of it, another 14 encouraged it through legislation, and another 10 supported it in other ways.

## Does It Work? Can We Tell?

Lickona and Davidson (2005) document a three-part effort to identify practices that seem to hold promise for character education at the secondary level. Beginning with a broad review of the literature on adolescent development, high school reform, and character education, the authors developed a framework for thinking about the characteristics of high schools that integrate ethics and excellence. First, they identified 24 high schools that had received external recognition for excellence. The schools, ranging in size from 300 to 4,300 students, were drawn from every section of the country and included public and private schools in rural, suburban, and urban settings. The researchers examined each school closely to ascertain successful strategies and develop generalizations about effective practice that is based on those strategies. Using focus groups, classroom observations, interviews, and analyses of program materials and archival data, the team developed portraits of the schools and their practices.

The findings are organized around the "promising practices" that the team identified as most effective for developing both individuals with key

character traits and an ethical learning community. The authors present their findings in the form of six principles for developing such a community:

1. Develop shared purpose and identity. Explicit expectations for personal behavior as well as academic achievement—such as an honor code, a school motto, and school traditions—provide important direction for students.
2. Align practices with desired outcomes and relevant research. Offering staff members and parents specific guidance about research-based strategies for meeting designated goals reinforces a school's efforts.
3. Have a voice; take a stand. Allowing students to have a voice in the classroom and in school affairs—as well as listening to faculty and staff members, parents, and community members—contributes to excellence and ethics in a school.
4. Take personal responsibility for continuous self-development. Adult members of the school community can set an example for students by promoting the need to strive for excellence and to engage in self-reflection. Thus, a culture of excellence and fostering personal responsibility is created in classrooms and schoolwide.
5. Practice collective responsibility for excellence and ethics. In a community that values ethics and excellence, adults and students intervene right away when others need support to succeed or do the right thing.
6. Grapple with tough issues. Collective responsibility for an ethical learning community entails confronting institutional practices or issues that are at odds with the school's commitment to excellence and ethics.

Promising practices also buttress the "eight strengths of character" identified as integral to "smart and good high schools":

- Lifelong learner and critical thinker
- Diligent and capable performer
- Socially and emotionally skilled person
- Ethical thinker
- Respectful and responsible moral agent
- Self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle
- Contributing community member and democratic citizen
- Spiritual person engaged in crafting a life of noble purpose.

After assessing their own school's needs, educators can select from a host of proven instructional strategies, high school reform designs, professional development opportunities, curricular structures, media literacy resources, study skills programs, team challenges, and academic initiatives that they can replicate in their own schools. The report concludes with a question-and-answer section that offers practical advice for initiating or implementing character education programs in schools that have a wide range of concerns.

For teachers who perceive character education as another frill that interferes with the real business of education, namely academic growth, this study

shows that teaching ethical values goes hand-in-hand with academic performance. A headmaster of a small, private school interviewed for the study summed up his vision: "To have an engaging school, you need three things: teachers ready to teach, students ready to learn, and something important to teach." Lickona and Davidson's study provides practitioners with verified strategies for character education that have worked in shaping high schools of excellence, strategies that middle level and high school educators can adapt to the needs of their schools.

Berkowitz and Bier (2005), the authors of the second study, look at existing research on character education programs "to help practitioners to be more effective in fostering the development of students' character" (p. 23). They began with a fairly broad definition of *character education*: "any school-based K-12 initiatives either intended to promote the development of some aspect of student character or for which some aspect of student character was measured as a relevant outcome variable" (p. 3). They sought to address four questions:

- For which programs is there research demonstrating effectiveness?
- What are the characteristics of effective programs?
- What do schools generally do that is effective?
- What are the effects of specific character education practices?

To answer the first question, Berkowitz and Bier identified 109 research studies that were potentially relevant and found that 69 of them provided scientifically sound evidence that 33 of the programs studied were effective. This list of programs provided the basis for answering the second question. The team developed lists of pedagogical strategies and other characteristics of the 33 programs for which there was some evidence of successful outcomes and collected data about how prevalent these strategies were. The question about the effectiveness of these strategies was more difficult to address, and the authors suggest that support for additional research on that question is needed.

On the question of the outcomes of character education, the team found an overall success rate of 51%—approximately half the time, positive change was found to result from the program studied. Among the areas in which the researchers noted the greatest degree of positive change were sociomoral cognition (thinking about ethical and moral issues), prosocial behaviors and attitudes, sexual behavior, problem-solving skills, and drug use. Moreover, the researchers found that cooperative learning and class discussions of moral issues were the most effective practices for producing academic and social outcomes.

From this review, Berkowitz and Bier (2005) concluded that, when effectively implemented, character education programs of many kinds can have a significant impact on young people and that the effects can be quite long lasting. They identified features that were characteristic of effective programs:

- Professional development. All 33 of the effective programs identified incorporated ongoing professional development.
- Peer interaction. All 33 also incorporated strategies for fostering peer interaction, such as discussion, role playing, and cooperative learning.

- Direct teaching and skill training. Many of the programs included direct instruction about character as well as teaching specific intrapersonal (e.g., self-management) and interpersonal (e.g., conflict resolution) skills and capacities.
- Explicit agenda. More than half the programs studied use specific language about character, morality, values, or ethics.
- Family and community involvement. Including parents and other community members—as recipients of character education and as participants in the design and delivery of the programs—was a common strategy.
- Models and mentors. Both peer and adult role models foster character development.
- Integration into academic curricula. Nearly half of the effective programs are integrated with academic curricula in some way, most often through social studies and language arts curricula.
- Multiple strategies. Virtually all of the effective programs use a multi-strategy approach, rather than relying on a single model or tool.

## How Does It Add Up?

These two studies offer a wealth of detail and descriptions that enrich the picture of how and why particular strategies stand out as effective. The data presented in the two studies indicate that character education initiatives affect student attitudes and behavior, thus setting the stage for improved academic performance.

They also take different but equally important approaches to the challenge of drawing conclusions about what works in character education. What is interesting in comparing the studies is that despite the difference in focus, there was similarity in identifying earmarks of fruitful character education programs at the secondary level, including:

- Goals should be both explicit and ambitious
- Professional development is necessary
- The whole school community should be involved, and everyone should have a voice
- Adults need to be role models.

Transforming the culture of a middle level or high school is not easy. As these studies point out, however, through careful planning, professional development, and involvement of all members of the school community, character education becomes far more than a passing fad; it is the road map to building a caring school culture, a safer and more-nurturing environment, and a more responsible and responsive student body, all of which lay the foundation for improved academic performance.

**Pamela Bolotin Joseph  
and Sara Efron**



## Seven Worlds of Moral Education

**I**n his striking critique of character education, Alfie Kohn suggests that educators might want to "define our efforts to promote children's social and moral development as an *alternative*" to character education.<sup>1</sup> In this article, we address Kohn's question "What does the alternative look like?" by describing the aims, practices, advantages, and difficulties of seven worlds of moral education—of which character education is only one. Lastly, we consider why character education should be the dominant approach to moral education in the United States when there are inspiring alternatives.

Viewing moral education as comprising various "moral worlds" helps us to imagine classrooms and schools that consistently support the beliefs, values, and visions that will shape students into adults and determine the world they will make. In such environments, moral education is a coherent endeavor created with purpose and deliberation. Educators in moral worlds believe that they must create a process through which young people can learn to recognize values that represent prosocial behaviors, engage in actions that bring about a better life for others, and appreciate ethical and compassionate conduct.

We describe below the moral worlds of character education, cultural heritage, caring community, peace education, social action, just community, and ethical inquiry. These worlds do not exist in isolation, nor are their purposes diametrically opposed; they may, in fact, share several characteristics. Classrooms and schools can also create coherent hybrid approaches that combine aspects of several moral worlds. Nonetheless, to clarify and foster conversations about moral education, we explore these approaches to social and ethical development as distinct moral worlds.

### Character Education

The moral world of character education rests on the conviction that schooling can shape the behavior of young people by inculcating in them the proper virtues. Proponents of this world argue that children need clear directions and good role models and, implicitly, that schools should shape character when families are deficient in this task. Advocates also recommend giving students numerous opportunities to do good deeds, such as taking part in service learning, which they believe will eventually lead to moral habits. Moreover, character educators believe in establishing strong incentives for good behavior.<sup>2</sup>

To no small extent, *The Book of Virtues*, by William Bennett, influences many character education programs. The virtues Bennett describes are "self-discipline, compassion, responsibility, friendship, work, courage, perseverance, honesty, loyalty, and faith." Another strong influence is Character Counts, a coalition that posits "six pillars of character": 1) be honest; 2) treat others with respect; 3) do what you are supposed to do; 4) play by the rules; 5) be kind; and 6) do your share to make your school and community better. Communities have also developed their own sets of traits or rules that guide character education programs.<sup>3</sup>

How do schools create a moral world using character traits as starting points? First, modeling virtuous behavior is a key component of character education programs—teachers, administrators, and students are instructed to be role models. Many schools call attention to character traits in public forums and displays such as assemblies, daily announcements, bulletin boards, and banners, as well as in the study of history and literature. School 18 in Albany, New York, uses "positive reinforcement of good character traits" through a Kids for Character program. "Students who are 'caught' doing something that shows good character have their names posted where the entire school community can see. Then, each Friday, those students are called to the office to receive a reward."<sup>4</sup>

Schools may emphasize a different character trait each month in curricular content and assemblies. In the Kent City Schools in Ohio, November is "compassion" month. In social studies classes, students "study those who immigrated to this country at great personal sacrifice, develop a school or community service project, and research the Underground Railroad and consider how people extended help to those escaping slavery." Self-control is the trait for December. In physical education classes, students "devise an exercise chart to help monitor personal fitness." In language arts, they "keep a personal journal of times self-control was used." And in math classes, they "graph the number of times students hand in assignments on time." Teachers may also infuse their classroom management strategies and lessons with respect for aspects of character.<sup>5</sup>

A strength of the character education moral world is educators' belief that it is their responsibility to form character rather than remain indifferent to their students' moral development. Another positive aspect of this approach is the goal of proponents to infuse character education throughout the curriculum and school environment in order for students to experience the consistency of a moral world both academically and socially.

However, character education raises a number of critical questions that its advocates have not satisfactorily addressed. Are behavioral traits in fact the same as moral character? Do displays of virtues or desired traits truly encourage moral behavior? Does the posting of character traits on banners and bulletin boards result in a "marquee mentality" and therefore not reach the hearts and minds of young people? Is character education merely indoctrination of dominant cultural standards that may not represent the values of diverse communities? And finally, do the values chosen by character educators reflect the status quo and encourage compliance with it?<sup>6</sup>

## Cultural Heritage

Like character education, the moral world of cultural heritage emphasizes values. These values, however, are not those of the mainstream but, instead, are drawn from the traditions of nondominant cultures. Unlike character education, there are no underlying assumptions that schools may have better values than those of communities and families or that schools need to instill character traits in children that may run counter to students' own cultural values. In the cultural heritage moral world, the spheres of school, home, and community are interconnected. Parents, elders, and cultural leaders educate children within and outside the walls of the school. Moreover, students learn cultural traditions and values not through direct instruction but by deep understanding of and participation in the culture's arts and ceremonies.

One embodiment of the cultural heritage world is the values instruction offered in Afrocentric schools. For example, the mission statement of the African American Academy for Accelerated Learning in Minneapolis affirms the importance of "reconnecting African American families to their cultural heritage, spirituality and history." The mission of the African American Academy, a public school in Seattle, is to instruct students in a way that "embraces the history, culture and heritage of African and African American people by studying and putting into practice the seven principles of Nguzo Saba: Umoja (Unity), Kujichagulia (Self-Determination), Ujima (Collective Work and Responsibility), Ujamaa (Cooperative Economics), Nia (Purpose), Kuumba (Creativity), and Imani (Faith)." Afrocentric schools emphasize parent involvement. In a report to the Kansas City Missouri Board of Education, the African Centered Education Task Force affirmed the African proverb "It takes an entire village to raise just one child" by giving parents an essential role in African-centered schools as "partners of the village."<sup>7</sup>

Native American schools that teach language, customs, and history also create the moral world of cultural heritage. In Native American education, cherished values include "respect [for] people and their feelings, especially respecting elders, and living in harmony with nature." Schools are imbued with a "sense of empathy and kinship with other forms of life" and a belief that "there should be no division between school climate and culture and family and community climate and culture." Parents and elders are present throughout the school, and students and teachers are expected to be in the community and the natural environment as well as in the classroom. The Tulalip Heritage School in Washington State (jointly sponsored by the public school district, the Boys and Girls Club, and the Tulalip Tribe) transmits its ethos to the students by having them learn the stories of ancestors, cultivating respect for Native American culture and "respect for one another," and recognizing the importance of community. The NAWAYEE Center School, an alternative high school in Minneapolis, offers cultural classes that "include art, spirituality, family, community, and oral traditions" but also strives to ensure that "American Indian cultural values and beliefs are modeled and integrated throughout the entire curriculum."<sup>8</sup>

The cultural heritage moral world has a number of advantages. Cultural heritage schools demonstrate respect for the cultures of their students by not just paying lip service to cultural diversity but being seriously committed to the sustenance of cultures. Partnerships with communities and meaningful parent involvement create active stakeholders in these schools and foster greater commitment to education. Continuity between the culture of the home and that of the school allows for moral instruction to use familiar patterns of communication, both verbal and nonverbal. As they learn through culturally congruent education, students do not experience a disjunction between their families' and schools' moral instruction. Furthermore, students have opportunities to learn more about their communities' moral values through the study of their history and culture, so moral learning is embedded within academic scholarship.<sup>9</sup>

A difficulty in implementing this model of moral education is its dependence on educators who come from the students' cultures or who themselves have deep knowledge of the culture. Districts clearly must do all that is possible to attract such educators and to sponsor community members in teacher preparation programs. Also, although all schools benefit from parents' and elders' participation, a fully realized moral world of cultural heritage would be most desired in certain schools or districts in which a significant percentage of the students are from one ethnic culture. It is crucial, however, to be sensitive to the concerns of the community. This model of moral education cannot be imposed upon a community, but it should be provided if the community so desires. Moreover, a focus on the cultural heritage of a community in no way precludes the need to learn the skills required for success in the dominant culture. Indeed, all the schools mentioned here also have a strong academic focus.

## Caring Community

The caring community emphasizes the ethic of care—nurturing, closeness, emotional attachment, and respectful, mutually supportive relationships. This moral world also focuses on the social and emotional health of all its community members. As the individuals in the classroom and the school begin to feel like a family, the school's institutional image is replaced by that of a home. Educators' moral influence stems from their caring relationships with students, parents, and one another. In the caring community, students are not rewarded for individual empathic actions; instead, these behaviors are considered the norm of the classroom culture.<sup>10</sup>

Accounts of schools as caring communities describe how teachers, administrators, parents, and students feel that they are members of a community. In these schools, class size is small, teachers are mentored, and all staff members feel and demonstrate genuine concern for students. In the classroom, nurturing peer relationships develop as students care for one another through informal and planned activities and structures such as buddy systems.<sup>11</sup>

In academics, the theme of caring is introduced through service learning projects and the study of literature that accentuates interpersonal and

intercultural understanding. The classroom environment features discussions and cooperative learning activities and is defined not by rules but by how students feel about being in the class and being with one another. For example, at the Russ School in California, children developed a list of "Ways We Want to Be in Room Eight" as their classroom rules rather than a list of prohibitions.<sup>12</sup>

Inclusiveness is another theme in the caring community, as schools welcome and nurture diverse populations, including special education students. For instance, when the Lincoln Center Middle School in Milwaukee chose to become a caring community, it expressed caring by selecting students by means of a lottery for all who were interested in its arts-based curriculum rather than by holding auditions or having specific admissions requirements. This moral world also features schoolwide activities that involve parents and community members. Moreover, families and school personnel communicate with one another about students' academic progress, social development, and emotional health.<sup>13</sup>

The caring community has numerous benefits for students. Researchers from the Developmental Studies Center Child Development Project report that children educated in such schools perceive their classrooms as fair, safe, caring places that are conducive to learning. Once more, students "with a strong sense of community [are] more likely to act ethically and altruistically, develop social and emotional competencies, avoid drug use and violent behavior, and [be] academically motivated." Emotional well-being is the catalyst for moral development in the caring community. As students feel respected and cared for in loving classroom and school environments, they are less likely to act out "from feelings of inferiority, cynicism, or egocentrism that blind them to others' feelings." Furthermore, students who are nurtured are more likely to expand their sphere of caring from friends, teachers, and families to others in their communities.<sup>14</sup>

Difficulties for educators who wish to create a caring community occur when school culture—large class size, disruptive pullout programs, and a history of not welcoming families—thwarts the building of caring relationships. Although educators may strive to create a caring classroom, students and teachers may feel "uncared for" when the school environment is hostile. Unfortunately, the students most in need of caring often have schools whose resources cannot support this moral world.<sup>15</sup>

## Peace Education

The moral world of peace education stems from an ethic of care that extends beyond the classroom. Moral commitments underpinning peace education include valuing and befriending the Earth, living in harmony with the natural world, recognizing the interrelatedness of all human and natural life, preventing violence toward the Earth and all its peoples, and learning how to create and live in a culture of peace. Peace education promotes "awareness of the interdependence of all things and a profound sense of responsibility for the fate of the planet and for the well-being of humanity."<sup>16</sup>

The components of peace education include:

- conflict resolution—developing skills and appreciation for nonviolent problem solving;
- peace studies—examining the causes of war and its prevention and participating in activities that focus on the meaning of peace and raise peace awareness;
- environmental education—developing an appreciation of and the desire to inquire into the interrelationships of humans, their cultures, their surroundings, and all forms of life;
- global education—recognizing the interdependent nature of the world and studying problems and issues that cut across national boundaries; and
- human rights education—learning about the universal rights of human beings and strengthening respect for fundamental freedoms.<sup>17</sup>

Although many U.S. schools teach violence-reduction skills, few create a holistic moral world that makes a connection between peaceful personal behaviors and promoting peace throughout the world. Maria Montessori's belief that education can contribute to world peace has been a profound influence on some schools that emphasize her vision. One World Montessori School in California is an example of a school devoted to peace as an ultimate moral goal. In its K-8 peace curriculum, "teachers assist the children in developing a common language of peace and work on their own communication, peace making, and peace keeping skills."<sup>18</sup>

Another school that teaches for peace and interconnectedness is the Global Village School in California, which develops materials for home-schoolers. Its "Peacemakers" course "presents role models who work to enact nonviolent social change and concrete examples of such successfully enacted change." And the peace awareness curriculum of the New School at South Shore, a public primary school in Seattle, is inspired by the school's mission to "view each child as a bright spirit on a magnificent journey in our quest to contribute powerfully to the healing of humanity and Mother Earth." The goal of the Environmental and Adventure School, a public school in Washington State, is to develop responsible citizens who are stewards of the Earth. This school's mission is based on the belief that "when students are out in their environment and learn to respect and care for their surroundings, they also learn to respect and care for their classmates and teachers." The theme of "interdependent relationships—people and environments" is woven into the junior high school curriculum both in the classroom and in the many natural settings nearby.<sup>19</sup>

Peace educators teach that all lives and actions matter and that students are connected to all of life through a vision of peace, harmony, and Earth stewardship. Peace educators aim to create "moral sensitivity to others in the immediate classroom [and] concern for local communities and for all life on the planet." Thus the greatest advantage of this moral world is that it nourishes students' desire for personal meaning in increasingly violent times. An academic benefit is that peace education can be integrated

into a stimulating curriculum that covers all disciplines, including science, language, and history.<sup>20</sup>

Creating an integrated peace education curriculum is difficult within traditional education systems in which content is taught in discrete disciplines. The greatest hurdle to creating this moral world, however, is the potential for conflict with community values. Undoubtedly, teaching about justice, sustainability, and peace challenges the prevailing world view in the U.S. by promoting values that confront uncontrolled economic development, consumerism, and militarism.

## Social Action

In the moral world of social action, the values of justice and compassion guide a curriculum focused on the political nature of society. Educators believe that students are both empathic human beings and social agents who are capable of effecting change by critically examining unjust situations and participating in political processes. Teachers encourage students to ask, "What should I be paying attention to in my world?" The social action approach taps students' idealism for bringing about a better world—to "heal, repair and transform the world."<sup>21</sup>

Students are encouraged to generate ideas, negotiate subject matter, and find learning resources outside of the school setting. They venture into the community to gather documents, conduct interviews, and make observations. Teachers believe that their role is to confront students' ignorance or prejudices by helping the students to understand both privilege and oppression and by cultivating a "critical consciousness" of the perspectives of others.<sup>22</sup>

An example of this moral world occurred at Nova Alternative High School, a public school in Seattle. A junior who works with a human rights group told her classmates and teachers about the difficult situation in East Timor. In response, students began meeting once a week to study East Timor's history, politics, and culture and to raise money for Kay Rala, a small high school in Manatuto that "was burned to the ground by Indonesian soldiers in the late 1990s." Rather than donating money to a charity, the Seattle students established direct contact with Kay Rala and developed a fund-raising system with the students in East Timor. The Seattle students raised thousands of dollars for the school. The student whose concerns sparked the project reported that her "world [had] opened up"—helping her "not only to see people who are less fortunate but instead of accepting dreary situations, to change them."<sup>23</sup>

Another account of the social action moral world is from a fifth-grade class in Aurora, Colorado. When her students were studying the Civil War, teacher Barbara Vogel explained to her pupils that slavery was not merely a defunct system from a bygone era in American history but that people in Sudan and elsewhere were enslaved in the present day. Although the children were horrified and distraught, Vogel did not try to comfort them or to rationalize such horrors. Instead, she sought to channel their feelings of concern and outrage into social action by helping her students start a letter-writing campaign to bring this dire situation to the public's attention. When their

letters did not change the fate of Sudanese slaves, the children raised money to buy freedom for a few slaves. As newspapers publicized the children's efforts, donations came in from around the world, and the class eventually purchased the freedom of more than 1,000 people. The class even developed a website to encourage others to stop slavery in Sudan.<sup>24</sup>

A highlight of the social action world is its Integrated curriculum—rich in academic, social, and political knowledge—which reflects the moral concerns of children and adolescents. Educators report that students learn to view themselves as social and political beings with the right to access the systems of influence in communities and the larger world. Through involvement in social action, students come to believe in themselves as moral agents.<sup>25</sup>

Creating this moral world is not without challenges. Teachers are responsible for creating an atmosphere in which students feel comfortable voicing their moral concerns and ensuring that students' ideas are not dismissed. Also, it requires a contemporary, integrated curriculum not constrained by rigid disciplinary boundaries. Moreover, despite the opportunities to make a difference, the social action moral world requires students to encounter misery and critically analyze the reasons for unjust acts and conditions. Accordingly, can students resist pessimism when they cannot easily change the world?

## Just Community

In the just community moral world, classrooms and schools become democratic settings that provide students with opportunities to deliberate about moral dilemmas and to participate in cooperative decision making. Students, teachers, and administrators openly discuss and address matters of mutual concern, construct the school community's policies and rules through procedures that are viewed as fair and just, and resolve moral conflicts. In the process of building community, students gain perspectives on the principles of justice and fairness by experiencing moral deliberations and by applying the principles to real and specific problems in the school community.<sup>26</sup>

The just community model, based on the ideas of Lawrence Kohlberg, holds that the goal of moral education is the enhancement of students' development from lower to higher stages of moral reasoning. Advocates for the just community assert that students influence their own moral development by deliberating about and seeking to resolve moral conflicts. Social interactions—i.e., lived moral dilemmas—advance learners' moral judgment as students clarify and refine their thoughts while listening and responding to other points of view. In such environments, "teachers and students engage in philosophical deliberation about the good of the community." Teachers can prepare even young students to participate in a just community by encouraging them to think about rules not as "immutable laws" but as constructed moral guidelines necessary for living in a community.<sup>27</sup>

Two examples of just community schools are in New York State: the Pablo Neruda Academy for Architecture and World Studies in the Bronx and the Scarsdale Alternative School. Both public high schools emphasize students' deliberation about moral dilemmas within real-world situations—freedom

combined with responsibility, cooperation over competition, and "how to balance the needs of individuals with those of the community." Features of these schools include community meetings, in which decisions are made about essential school policy; fairness committees, in which conflicts among students or students and teachers are resolved; and advisories, in which students discuss their own problems and plan the agendas for community meetings.<sup>28</sup>

An advantage of the just community is its unequivocal naming of justice as a safeguard of individuals' rights and the community's well-being. The ideal of democracy is both a moral standard and a guiding light, raising awareness of good citizenship within a moral context. Finally, students learn that their views and actions make a difference because their moral inquiries do not seek to resolve hypothetical situations or to prepare them for life outside of school but are focused on the school itself.<sup>29</sup>

One problem with the just community approach is that it takes a great deal of time for students to develop real trust among themselves and to deliberate about and resolve issues. Another difficulty is that most teachers have not been trained to facilitate "an apprenticeship in democracy." Finally, truly democratic school cultures with shared authority have been exceedingly rare, and this moral world cannot exist without students' uninhibited conversations and real decision-making authority.<sup>30</sup>

## Ethical Inquiry

In the world of ethical inquiry, moral education is a process by which students engage in "moral conversation" centered on dilemmas. Also influenced by Lawrence Kohlberg's theories, this ethical inquiry approach to moral education is grounded on the premise that deliberation promotes students' moral development. Within respectful, egalitarian, and carefully facilitated discussions, teachers invite students to investigate values or actions and to imagine alternatives. In this world, students consider "how human beings should act," "life's meaning and the human place in the world," "the sources of evil and suffering," and "universal existential concerns and ways of knowing such as the meaning of friendship, love, and beauty."<sup>31</sup>

Teachers guide discussions on the moral dilemmas embedded within subjects across the curriculum. Springboards for ethical inquiry include literature, history, drama, economics, science, and philosophy. In particular, students learn about the consequences of making moral decisions and how fictional characters and real people make choices when aware that a moral question is at stake. Through this process of inquiry, students ponder the effects that moral, immoral, and amoral actions have on themselves and others, empathize with and appreciate the perspectives of others (their classmates as well as fictional characters or historical figures), and construct their understanding of what it means to be a moral human being.<sup>32</sup>

There are numerous accounts of how teachers integrate moral inquiry into their literature, social studies, and science classroom—illustrating that most topics have ethical dimensions. Teachers also use published curricula, such as *Philosophy for Children*, that provide stories and other media for

ethical deliberation. *Facing History and Ourselves*, a curriculum about 20th-century genocide, focuses on teaching middle and high school students "the meaning of human dignity, morality, law, citizenship, and behavior." This curriculum aims to help students learn to reason morally as they think about their individual decisions and behavior toward others.<sup>33</sup>

A value of the ethical inquiry world is that it is not an "add-on" program but rather a way to integrate genuine moral deliberation into all academic areas—becoming a norm of the classroom culture. Ethical inquiry provides opportunities for students to appreciate others' viewpoints and to bring different perspectives into their own deliberations—important skills for democratic citizenship. This moral world also capitalizes on the process of identity development, making the search for moral identity an explicit goal.<sup>34</sup>

Because it is a process of inquiry and negotiation, a criticism of ethical inquiry is that it does not explicitly teach values. Teachers act as important intellectual role models who care about their students' ideas and their construction of personal ethics, but they do not overtly advocate particular moral standards. Another concern is ethical inquiry's cognitive approach to moral education. Educators do not guide students to help others or to bring about a better society but instead trust that students who think ethically will actively participate in the world beyond the classroom.

## Choosing a Moral World

Our description of seven worlds of moral education reveals that there is "no perfect world." All moral worlds have their limitations, and educators face challenges no matter which approach they take to moral education. How then do we select a moral world for classrooms and schools?

Educators face hard choices, but choose they must, as these seven worlds hold dissimilar assumptions about what constitutes best practice for moral education. These worlds also reveal different conceptions of learners. They posit that moral educators can think about students as material to be shaped, as feelers with emotional needs, as thinkers whose judgments can be stimulated, or as villagers who learn from elders. Indeed, these moral worlds hold different understandings of *morality* itself. Does morality mean having good character, nurturing peers, caring for those who suffer (those both near and far), or being stewards of the Earth?

Serious ethical deliberation about the aims and practices of moral education cannot be avoided. It would be a mistake to try to create an approach to moral education that represents the "best of all worlds," because forming an amalgam of many approaches is more likely to result in a haphazard environment in which students receive conflicting messages. Moral educators need to decide on one approach or to create a thoughtfully considered hybrid that has clear aims and coherent practices. Too often, consideration of moral education (as well as any aspect of education) focuses only on the inadequate question of what works rather than on what we define as our utmost hopes for our students and the society in which they will live. When we ask the moral question, not merely the operational one, we allow ourselves to imagine our students

having lives of meaning, taking part in genuine and peaceful relationships, and living without violence, cynicism, and despair.

The most popular world of moral education at present is character education. Numerous politicians, organizations, and boards of education advocate its implementation. Yet, as we explore these seven moral worlds, we see that character education has the most limited vision of morality and moral education—despite its advocates' good intentions.

How do we compare naming "the trait of the month" to teaching children to have a deep appreciation for peace and for sustaining the Earth? Why should we select stories in the hope that students will assimilate certain values or emulate heroes when we can teach literature as a springboard for pondering moral dilemmas and developing moral identities? Why should we settle for posting the names of "good" children on a bulletin board when we can aim to create loving, familial classrooms or a village of moral educators? How do we equate mandated service learning with a thought-fully conceived student-led effort of social action, not only to alleviate suffering but also to stop cycles of poverty and injustice?

We question why the dominant approach to moral education consists of the practice of giving rewards to students just for following rules and for occasional acts of kindness. Instead, should we not help students to engage in profound ethical deliberation, revere peace, be cared for and be caring, and develop as moral agents who can repair the world? Why are these not among the endorsed goals of moral education?

In conclusion, the other six moral worlds hold more humane, imaginative, and profound visions of morality and moral education than those of character education. These compelling alternatives deserve serious consideration on the part of educators.

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# POSTSCRIPT



## Should Character Education Define the Values We Teach Students?

Can we answer the question posed for this issue by gathering and evaluating data through empirical research? In one respect, the answer is yes. It certainly would be possible to compare the relative effectiveness of two curricula—one including a character education component and the other with a strictly academic focus or with a broader moral focus such as that proposed by Joseph and Efron—in achieving the hoped-for moral qualities in students. In any such study, of course, care would need to be taken to ensure that the students, classes, or schools compared were identical in all respects save the moral dimensions of the curricula.

In another respect, however, the question may not simply be answerable by empirical data. It simply may not be possible to reach consensus on what the objectives of a moral education should be. Ultimately, decisions about the content of any moral education curriculum will be decided not by recourse to empirical investigation or by considerations of universal acceptance but rather by the beliefs and values of those who have the power to make decisions about the schools; namely, government leaders, the educational establishment that trains teachers, and the people who develop and administer the curriculum. Because access to these positions of power has been limited until recently to those of the majority culture, it is likely that the moral values contained in most educational programs will reflect to a very large degree those of the majority culture.

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