Discernment

So that you may be able to discern what is best. *Phil. 1:10*

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Character Education in the Public Schools

■ The middle school located one block west of Wheaton's campus is adorned with a list of character traits—such as integrity, respect, honesty—permanently affixed on the archway of the main entrance. Several of our local elementary schools have regular assemblies promoting one or more values through skits, comments, and songs. I suppose that nearly every schoolchild in Wheaton now knows that character counts.

We must ask important questions about these programs, for my community is typical of those across the nation. According to the Character Education Partnership, 47 states have received federal money for implementing character education programs in their schools. Given the near ubiquity of these programs, we ought to ask if they are effective. Do our children actually experience character growth through these programs? And if so, is this the kind of character we desire?

> "Do our children actually experience character growth through these programs?"

Christian parents, in particular, ought to be keenly interested in the ways character is cultivated in public schools and through community programs. Ought we welcome the secular promotion of character for those children who we hope will practice the character of Christ? Gene Bedley, a Christian who has developed a widely used character education program in the public schools, typically handles an inquiry from a Christian parent by asking, "Here is the list of character traits we celebrate in our curriculum [e.g., respect, integrity, compassion, initiative]. Which of these don't you want your child to model?" This is a good response, and probably similar thinking guides the Christians in my community who have supported, at least implicitly, the growth of character education programs.

Yet, such a response may not be the final answer. One evening, when reading the teacher's weekly activity calendar to my first grader, I asked about an all-school assembly devoted to the character trait of trustworthiness. His response startled me: "I don't like trustworthiness," he said in a soft voice. "Why?" I asked. "Because they make it sound like a god." Through the lens of a basic but profound truth that there is only one God, my son apparently detected in this assembly a celebration of an idea that, for him, encroached on what is reserved for God alone. Thus, at least one child saw this assembly as inconsistent with his Sunday School teaching. So, yes, we want our children to be trustworthy, but how is this value imparted, and at what price?

In this issue, we have two essays by national leaders in character education that offer differing visions of an educational environment suitable for nurturing a child's moral life. We also have candid reflections on character education by Christian educators and researchers. No single newsletter can answer all the questions, but time spent here will assist greatly in the important task of nurturing the moral growth of our children.

Kenneth Chase

Kenneth Chase, director of CACE

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Pursuing a Life of Virtue

By Kevin Ryan

■ Human beings come into life with few instincts, but with the potential for human excellence. No one is preprogrammed for success or for disaster. Inherent in each of us are the seeds of virtue and the promise of leading a worthwhile and noble life. Who we become very much depends, first, on what we habitually think, feel, and do, and second, on what we learn from others. Each one of us has to learn what it means to be fully human, to actualize our potential as human beings and to make a positive contribution to society. We do this primarily through the formation of good character.

Character is the sum of one's habits, that is, one's good habits or virtues and one's bad habits or vices. Vices, such as selfishness and sloppiness, are come by easily. Virtues are a different story. Habits such as kindness and persistence take hard work and regular practice. Over time, these habitual ways of responding to the myriad and changing events of our lives almost automatically determine our reactions to our circumstances. If we have the virtue of honesty, when we find someone's wallet on the pavement, we are *characteristically* disposed to track down its owner and return it. If we possess the vice of dishonesty, the reverse is true. Our character, then, is our profile of habits and dispositions to act in certain ways. People who know us well recognize and come to rely on these distinctive marks we exhibit, coming to trust (or mistrust) us because they know our character. The formation of good character, therefore, is one of our most essential human tasks.

The formation of sound moral character is based upon good habits of thought, feeling, and action, combined with the capacity to discern right from wrong. Virtues pave the road to human happiness, which from the time of the ancient Greeks has been widely acknowledged as the driving and ultimate purpose of life. Character education, then, is about engaging the minds of our young in their understanding of a life of virtue, a life that should lead to happiness. It also means inspiring and encouraging their hearts to desire a life of virtue, and employing their hands in practicing virtue daily.

Engraving character

The word, *character,* comes from a Greek word, *charassein,* meaning "to engrave," such as on a wax tablet or a stone surface. Each of us is called to engrave our own character. A young child is like a wax tablet, and it is the responsibility of his parents and the adults around him to help him engrave or mark himself with good habits. In infancy and through the early years, the young engraver needs the guiding hand of caring adults. By the late teens, the task of engraving is shifted, so that the youth is fully in charge of marking his own character. We cannot just lay this fundamental human mission before the young, but it is essential that he become quite conscious of this essential task of crafting his own character. Like any accomplished craftsman, he must have a *vision* of what he is making and he must have the necessary *tools.*

Most children today move and exist within a complex of family, neighborhood, faith, and school communities, where good parents and teachers direct them how to behave. But at the same time, moral teachers must provide them with a *vision of how they ought to behave,* provided by the example of others. George Matthew Adams captured well how important good example is to human growth and development when he wrote, "There is no such thing as a 'self-made' man. We are made up of thousands of others. Everyone who has ever done a kind deed for us, or spoken one word of encouragement to us, has entered into the make-up of our character and of our thoughts, as well as our success."

Besides the living example of the people present in a child's life, there is also great teaching power in the lives that children come in contact with through stories and, increasingly in our day, through the various media. It is from this mix of real and mediated examples that a child develops her personal vision of what constitutes an admirable person and, hence, what she ought to strive to be. Therefore the wise parent and teacher, in addition to their consciousness of the power of their personal example, deliberately attend to the quality of the examples to which the child is exposed. As much as possible, the child is sheltered from cruel playmates, vile adults, and the toxic icons of popular culture. When the child encounters these flawed models, the adult is ready to point out their failings. But more positively, adults deliberately enrich the child's heart and mind with vivid accounts of individuals, young and old, real and fictional, whose example the child should strive to emulate. These inspirational models give the child visions of what she can and should become.

But having models of good and worthy lives is not enough. The child must be an active craftsman, or, as Thomas Carlyle said, the architect of his character. "Instead of saying that man is the creature of circumstance, it would be nearer the mark to say that man is the architect of circumstance. It is character which builds an existence out of circumstance. From the same materials one man builds palaces, another hovels; one warehouses, another villas; bricks and mortar are mortar and bricks until the architect can make them something else." To do this, each of us needs a set of tools.

"Virtues pave the road to human happiness, which from the time of the ancient Greeks has been widely acknowledged as the driving and ultimate purpose of life."

Tools of the Trade

The tools of character formation are self-knowledge of one's own behavior and the skills to fashion a good habit and to eliminate a bad habit. The child must be made aware of his patterns of action and how they affect his neighbors, seeing himself as others do. If he is being cruel or unkind, those around him must help him to self-awareness. But he must also know how to make a change. He must learn impulse control, to consider the effects of his actions, and to substitute one behavior for another. In a more positive vein, he must learn how to acquire behaviors or habits he lacks. If he lacks kindness, he must take initial steps to perform acts of kindness. And once he has performed these initial acts, he must monitor himself until kindness is no longer a series of isolated individual acts, but the habitual way he responds to those around him. The basic tool of character crafting, then, is the knowledge of how to eliminate one's bad habits or vices and to engrave one's good habits or virtues.

Children are not mere blocks of stone we adults carve into our ideals. Gradually, as a child grows in knowledge and strength, the parent and teacher can loosen the guiding hand and turn over to the child the craft of engraving virtues and smoothing over the rough edges of vice. Good parents and teachers believe in children and are committed to helping them to fulfill their potential, build on strengths, achieve contour, and catch the light of virtue.

Our schools are currently in the very early stage of reviving concern for good character. In recent efforts to respond to the challenge of character education, a number of approaches, some old and some new, are being advanced. Among these are conflict resolution, the skills of ethical thinking, service learning, values clarification, creating caring classrooms, civility training, the democratic schools movement, and numerous curricula which focus students' attention on moral issues. It is essential, however, that the serious and sustained study of the virtuous life be the center of a school's character education program. Without this centerpiece, character education is cut from its moorings and becomes mere skills training or, worse, social indoctrination. Authentic character education means helping young people become the active and enthusiastic sculptors of their own lives and character, giving them rich visions of flourishing lives and the tools and opportunities to practice virtues and uproot their vices.

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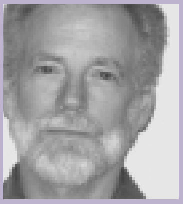
The Development of Moral Character

By Larry Nucci and Stacey Horn

■ A perennial question for parents and educators is how best to raise good children. How we answer that question rests largely on what we assume about moral development and what it means to lead a moral life. We have learned quite a bit over the past fifty years about the nature of moral development. What we have learned is encouraging in the sense that all humans appear to strive toward the moral good beginning in very early childhood. What we have learned is also humbling in that the traditional notions of socialization and human virtue have been found to account neither for the nature of human morality nor the process of moral growth as one moves from childhood to maturity. These discoveries require us to adopt a nuanced view of moral character in which reason and moral principle rather than inculcated virtues form the basis of our moral dispositions to action.



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Morality versus Community Standards and Religious Norms

One of the most important things that we have discovered is that morality cannot be equated with community standards or religious norms. Children as young as four years of age treat moral issues of harm, human welfare, and the fair treatment of others in terms of the effects that these actions have upon people rather than in terms of the rules or social norms governing these actions. For example, young children view it as wrong to hit someone at school whether or not the school had a rule about hitting. Preschool children extend this judgment to say that it would be wrong for a school to allow hitting because children would get hurt if such behavior were permitted. In contrast, young children view the wrongness of violating a social convention, such as calling an adult by his first name rather than by Mr., as contingent on whether or not a rule exists. Children view it equally right for a school not to have a rule requiring children to use formal titles when referring to adults. Similarly, deeply religious Jewish and Christian children and adolescents have been found to view moral transgressions such as hurting others, stealing, lying, or slandering as actions that would be wrong whether or not God had made a commandment prohibiting such actions. On the other hand, they viewed norms particular to their own religion—such as the day of worship, whether one works on the Sabbath, and so forth—as dependent upon a scriptural command or religious norm.

These discoveries tell us that morality is different from social norms in general, and that moral development cannot simply be reduced to the acquisition of the norms and standards of one's society or religion. These findings also tell us that children's morality involves exercising judgment, rather than directly resulting from the inculcation of norms by parents and teachers.

Easy Virtue

Any parent or teacher knows that these findings about children's morality cannot be the whole story. If children know that hitting, lying, and stealing are wrong, then why do they do these things? There are at least two answers to this question. The first is that there are times when lying, hitting someone, or otherwise engaging in an "immoral" action might actually be the right thing to do. The issue of lying offers many good examples. One could argue that when someone asks you about his/her new haircut, it might be better to lie and say it looks great instead of what you truthfully think. In this case the "virtue" of honesty will not serve you well because telling the truth will hurt someone's feelings. One could also argue that it might be better to lie than to let a child molester know the whereabouts of a kindergartner. Here again, the "virtue" of honesty will not serve as a guide to moral action. In both cases, moral judgment is needed to weigh the worth of one virtue against another.

The second way in which children (and adults) appear to do the wrong thing is when a moral action such as honesty competes against other goals. We have been inundated in recent years with reports about the rampant degree of academic cheating that takes place in schools and colleges. Interviews with young people indicate that they cheat in situations with high stakes for success or failure, such as admission to college, and where grades rather than learning have become the goal. In such cases, some young people judge that cheating makes more sense than doing "the right thing." It is this sort of behavior that we commonly think of as evidence of poor character. What we also know from studies of student cheating and related examples of lapses in character is that in most cases the people doing the cheating in one context are also the same people who resist cheating in other situations. The conclusion that we draw from studies of cheating is that what is guiding moral actions is not a set of fixed virtues such as honesty, but rather the ways in which people weigh moral and non-moral factors in specific contexts.

Inculcating Moral Judgment?

If what is guiding our moral actions are our moral judgments, then how do we insure that children will develop sound moral reasoning? In other words, can we inculcate children with proper moral judgment? There are in fact many things that we can inculcate in children. By controlling the information we expose our children to, and by systematically manipulating rewards and sanctions, we can produce children who will hold many of the same views that we adults do. Reports from the Middle East provide a steady stream of images in which young children are systematically bathed in the dye of religious and ethnic hatred by adult authorities bent on raising a new generation of combatants. We can also inculcate attachment to a nation and instill a sense of patriotism. The question, of course, is whether we can instill an attitude of openness and fairness toward others. To do so would require that we inculcate children with an attitude of questioning so that young people develop the ability to weigh what they are told against their own interpretations of what is morally right. But, to do so is by definition a contradiction of what it means to inculcate. The processes required to develop children's ability to engage in moral judgment rest upon experiences that encourage the child's autonomous decision-making rather than infusing the child with the "right" answers or set of beliefs. This position, however, would seem to run counter to the traditional account of character formation—namely, that it is the result of the inculcation of moral virtues.

> "We have been inundated in recent years with reports about the rampant degree of academic cheating that takes place in schools and colleges."

Habits of the Mind

Moral character is not fostered through inculcation, but rather its opposite. It begins with our efforts in early childhood to make meaning out of experiences that have moral consequences. As we grow older, our early intuitions are either supported by a benign and fair social environment, or distorted through experiences of neglect or abuse. When the young child's sense of fairness plays out within a set of repeated experiences in which fair action is reciprocated, the child constructs a view of the world as benign—fairness begets further fairness. The child then consolidates her concepts of what is morally called for in everyday social interactions. This active engagement in moral life, which is appropriately the source of moral habits, results from the child's own active social meaning making. As the child gets older, her sense of what is fair becomes applied to a wider and more complex set of social contexts in which her habitual ways of responding transform into more complex forms of moral judgment. As adults we would want to insure that she would make the right choices and do the right thing. However, there is no shortcut to wisdom and no ethical way in which to control her moral life. What we can do is to provide opportunities in which to challenge her moral choices and cause her to justify in moral terms the choices that she makes. With each moral decision she alters not only the course of her own life, but also the very nature of her moral character. It is through the reciprocal processes of judgment, action, and reflection that she will grow as a moral being.

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Character Education in the Public Schools:
The Challenge and the Opportunity for Christians

By David Fitch

■ In order for public schools to teach character, educators and parents must agree on a set of common virtues. But this is not as easy as it seems. Virtues like courage, respect, honesty, and compassion may appear at first to be the same across religious or cultural lines. But when teachers really teach these virtues they must flesh them out in all their details, and it is here where the religious and cultural differences appear. Such differences provide both a challenge to Christian parents as well as an opportunity.

Differences between the virtues are inevitable because virtues depend upon specific ways of life for their definition. Virtues are not produced out of a universal human consciousness, but achieve real life purposes given to them in traditions. So, as Alasdair MacIntyre has argued in *After Virtue,* a virtue is a different thing depending upon where it comes from. It changes depending upon whether it is Homer, Aristotle, or the New Testament from which you are working.[1] Self-control means something different to a Catholic seminarian than it does to someone graduating from Harvard Business School. And one person's self control is another person's cowardice. Virtues are only useful and worth having when aligned with purposes and ways of life in which they make sense.[2] MacIntyre, therefore, uncovers the painful truth: you cannot separate a virtue from the moral tradition that gave it birth. It is inevitable, therefore, that virtues will show differences among people of different faiths, particularly as teachers get more into the details of the virtues.

We can illustrate this by examining the virtue *courage.* This virtue inevitably raises the question "courage to do what?" The basis for distinguishing courage from foolhardiness is based upon what purposes one deems worthy of courage. So courage to say no to sexual advances, or courage to make them, is entirely dependent upon what one thinks are the proper ends of human sexuality. Similarly, the way a Mennonite pacifist displays courage in the midst of war would be different than an ROTC patriot. It is not possible to separate the outworking of what courage looks like from the deepest moral values of one's religious or cultural tradition. To teach courage, therefore, requires getting specific about the values and purposes that define it, and getting specific inevitably exposes differences that arise out of the religious and cultural sources of these virtues.

The virtues of Christians are not exempt from this exposing of differences. Again, using courage as an example, children of Christians will be courageous differently because of the Christian way they see the world. They may be courageous because God is in control, Jesus is Lord, and "I can trust Him to carry me through." Such an understanding of reality changes the way Christians act toward themselves and others. And so, for Christians, courage is different from other forms of this virtue shaped in worlds separated from Christianity, including those that can be taught in the public school. It is impossible for the public schools to teach virtue in a way that gives the cross of Jesus Christ the central place it possesses for the virtues of every Christian. For the Christian, therefore, there are no adequate common virtues, and the same is probably true for people committed to other faiths and traditions of substance.

Navigating Dissent

If disagreement over common virtues is inevitable, what do public schools do? I would argue that public schools often do one of two options. They either: 1) teach the lowest common denominator virtues where virtues are devoid of enough specific content to avoid any disagreements; or 2) teach virtue by becoming a tradition unto themselves. With the first option, public schools end up teaching virtues that have no driving religious purpose or motivation for the students to use them. Students may find them interesting at first, but these virtues will not compel the students to actually make them part of who they are. They will be "take it or leave it" behavioral choices the students will use as long as it serves some immediate short-term gratification. With the second option, public schools form a moral tradition around general public agreements. For example, most Americans can at least agree "Johnny should go to school so he can get a good job." Most Americans can also at least agree that we must train our children to get along with people that are different than us so we can live without violence. Indeed most Americans can agree that it is important to think critically as individuals in order to participate in a democratic society. These values are born out of the *ethos* of capitalism and democracy and they provide the basis for a tradition all its own. They most often drive the content of what public schools teach as character.[3]

For Christians and people of other faiths, however, this should not be enough. They should not succumb to this attempt to homogenize the virtues. Christians should want a version of respect that teaches children to do more than just tolerate other people's freedom, but to see others as people Christ died for. Christians should desire a version of "hard work" that is more than about getting a good job; it is about glorifying God. As a result, to the Christian, the public schools look like they are training our children into virtues that promote self interest, self flourishing, and the honoring of each person's right to do the same. And Christians should sometimes downright disagree with these interpretations of virtue.

"Christians should want a version of respect that teaches children to do more than just tolerate other people's freedom, but to see others as people Christ died for."

The Opportunity of Uniqueness

It is clear, then, that Christians face a challenge in relation to public schools and character education. Amidst the public schools' default version of common virtues, the Christian stands out with virtues that remain un-homogenous. This is an opportunity, however, to critically engage the schools on this issue. Christians can learn from the social ethic of John Howard Yoder, who taught that Christians need not withdraw from culture just because it is no longer uniform in its friendliness to Christian values. Instead, Yoder preached a "critical engagement" with the powers of culture one by one rejecting some elements, including others into their lives, and indeed at times capturing some cultural elements for the Lordship of Christ.[4] Thus the turf of public character education is one such opportunity for all Christians to engage the virtues one by one and teach their children what true Christian character is. Character education can actually become a stepping-off ground for children to present what it means for the Christian to be patient, courageous, honest, and so forth. In the process, Christian children are more firmly grounded in their own way of virtue and strengthened through interacting with other children. The public school's character education can become a place for Christians to critically engage their culture.[5] Yoder rightly saw that such critical engagement would require a place out of which the Christian can stand and discern these issues, and for Yoder, this was the church. For Yoder, Christians need to develop their own source of virtue first, teach their children as a church, and then engage the public schools for what they can learn, what they must reject, and what they can give to the public, who, as we have seen, has limited sources for its own virtue.

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[1] Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984) p.188.

[2] MacIntyre, *After Virtue,* ch. 14; Stanley Hauerwas, *A Community of Character* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981) pp.112-112, 124-128.

[3] See, for example, Thomas Lickona, *Educating for Character* (New York: Bantom Books, 1991) whose version of responsibility and respect—his two main virtues—look suspiciously well chosen for the goals and purposes of democracy and capitalism.

[4] The argument for "critical engagement" is best put forward by Yoder in his "How H. Richard Niebuhr Reasoned: A Critique of Christ and Culture," in Glen H. Stassen, D.M. Yeager, and John Howard Yoder, *Authentic Transformation* (Nashville: Abington Press, 1996).

[5] A proposal for the schools to invite children of all traditions to defend and critique their traditions is offered by Robin Lovin, "The School and the Articulation of Values," *American Journal of Education* (Feb 1988) pp. 143-161.

Question:

Which Values Ought We Teach in Public Schools, and Can They Be Identical to Ones Taught at Home?

To sharpen our thinking on the practical issues of moral formation, Discernment *has asked two professors of education to respond to separate but connected questions about the nature of teaching in today's public schools. Their responses, along with further resources, are printed on pages 8–11.—Editor*

By Jillian Lederhouse

■ What values we teach in public schools is a highly complex question in today's increasingly diverse school population. However, it is not a new question. As a society, we have long examined what we regard as virtuous and then sought to transmit these same values to the next generation. These include love for family, love for country, and respect for others.

Unfortunately, it is impossible to model and affirm ethical behavior that does not, at some time, violate someone's personal values. France, in its attempt to not violate the separation of church and state, has offended virtually every religious individual that attends its schools by eliminating all religious jewelry and clothing. However, just because we cannot fully accomplish this goal does not mean that we should not even attempt it. While we may have differences over concepts such as tolerance, we can have agreement over concepts such as respect and responsibility. There is much that can be accomplished by focusing on what we have in common and developing a shared vision of what we want for the next generation of citizens.

In the absence of a religious framework, the moral domain is comprised of issues surrounding human welfare and justice. Areas of human welfare that surface in the elementary classroom would include not causing harm to individuals (hitting or hurting), their property (stealing), or their reputations (slander). Justice issues would include treating each other fairly, such as extending opportunities to learn, work, and play to every individual. While Christians would see the roots of these virtues in both the Ten Commandments and the Sermon on the Mount, the virtues serve a secular purpose in the schoolroom and larger society.

Not only do I believe that teachers can motivate students to grow as moral agents, I believe it is their significant responsibility. But I do not believe they accomplish this primarily through a formalized character education program or solely through leading discussions on ethical dilemmas. Character education programs, popular through the 1950s, have resurfaced today partially in response to a rise in school violence. Although these types of programs have admirable goals, I have seen few at the elementary level that help students develop the critical thinking skills needed to challenge whether their own behavior and those of their classmates is indeed ethical. Instead, too many programs tend to equate moral behavior with compliance and conformity. Unquestioned obedience is a dangerous virtue to teach in and of itself at any age level. Alfie Kohn (1998) reminds us that under Hitler, Nazi youth were well educated in character education while millions of Jews were being killed. Compliance, necessary for any group to function, must be balanced with an emphasis on self-determination. Without self-determination and critical thinking skills, children are easy targets for gang membership, peer pressure to engage in high-risk behavior, and propaganda.

Like character education programs, discussions of ethical dilemmas, often introduced at higher grade levels, have their strengths and weaknesses. Although they encourage students to articulate and examine their own moral perspectives, which can lead to higher levels of moral reasoning, most ethical problems are divorced from the day-to-day activities that children experience. While these constructs may involve children of similar age and background to the students, they still are isolated from actual practice. Discussions that focus on these constructs can also be so open-ended that they fail to offer much moral guidance.

Teachers can make use of these limited tools, but one of the most dynamic components to moral development in the classroom is the *manner* in which a teacher engages with his or her students. Hansen (2001) and Palmer (1998) both emphasize the importance of the teacher's relationship with students in developing their character. Noddings (2002) advocates an ethic of caring as the foundation for all curriculum and instruction that is first demonstrated through the relationship of teacher to student. The moral manner of a teacher includes modeling but goes beyond it. A teacher's manner—the way in which teachers interact with their students—seeks to provide a consistency between word and action, but it also affirms moral integrity in the day-to-day actions and interactions of students.

> "Unfortunately, it is impossible to model and affirm ethical behavior that does not, at some time, violate someone's personal values."

In order to understand the complexity of moral development, educators must recognize how community life outside their schools may differ from life within their classrooms. When one of my former students, an elementary character education teacher in a Chicago public school, asked her third grade students to give an example of courage, one boy replied, "It means to get my nerve up, so I can fight a kid that's bigger than me." His friend quickly corrected him, "Not *that* kind of courage, *Miss Jones'* kind of courage!"

Even by age nine, Miss Jones' students recognized that street life and school life required two different sets of behavioral standards. Survival in the community, at times, requires a set of guidelines modified from those of the learning community. But dealing with differences between parental and educational expectations is generally not that problematic. Although they may disagree over some aspects of what is virtuous, teachers' and parents' conceptions of ethical behavior don't necessarily have to mirror each other's for children to develop a sense of values.

Some level of difference always exists between school and home even in strongly homogeneous classrooms and communities. Every child learns that classrooms, because of the number of individuals involved, require a set of behaviors unlike those they demonstrate at home. These are not moral differences, but differences in social convention (Nucci, 1989). At home, children are not usually expected to raise their hands to ask questions around the dinner table. Once they are able to reach a faucet, they don't generally have to ask permission to get a drink of water. However, they are often required to follow these procedures in school. Similarly, children quickly learn that they cannot talk loudly in a church service or movie theater. These experiences lead them to the realization that context often determines what is appropriate and inappropriate behavior. Many times a teacher will help a child adapt his/her behavior with the reminder such as, "In *school,* we keep our hands to ourselves." In the same manner, parents may have values not emphasized by the school or other institutions and families. At these times, their conversations begin, "In *this* family, we ...." Part of a family's identity is found in the specific ways members relate to each other.

I believe both have important roles to play in character formation, with parents being a much more significant influence than teachers. While children spend a substantial amount of time with their teacher over the course of a year, a parent is a child's lifelong teacher. Each adult has a unique place in the development of a child's moral framework.

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Question:

What Is the Role of the Teacher in Cultivating Student Character?

By Sally E. Morrison

■ Teachers need to understand their role as moral agents in the school. May (1970) argues that teachers acting *in loco parentis*—acting in place of the parent—places them in the role of moral stewardship. Goodlad (1990) and Sizer and Sizer (1999) agree that it is a reasonable expectation for teachers to be moral agents. While a teacher's influence comes from the overt moral curriculum, it also stems from those more subtle influences described as a teacher's *manner* (Fenstermacher, 2001; Richardson and Fenstermacher, 2001), *tact* (van Manen, 1991), *expressive morality* (Jackson, Boostrom, and Hansen, 1992; Hansen, 2001), and *moral sensibilities* (Hansen, 1995) that weave their way into classroom practice and interaction. Teaching as a moral *craft* (Tom, 1984) or *moral enterprise* (Goodlad, Sirotnik, and Soder, 1990) describes the teacher as the ultimate force in shaping classroom climate and experience.

Despite their role, teachers are not always able to discuss the moral nature of their work. Several researchers note that a recurring theme of a crisis of confidence emerged as teachers described their work. McDonald (1992) stated that teachers perceive their personal understandings and intuitions of classroom practice as "disqualified by being below standards of truth" or that their work is "highly provisional" in that their insights help them get through the day but are not particularly worth sharing with anyone (p.16). Maeroff (1988) also stated that teachers often feel uncomfortable engaging in moral scrutiny of their work. Oser (1992) further explained that teachers believe an unwritten rule exists that "morality hinders success" (p.116). In an age of testing and results, they think that it is safer to keep the goals of practice aligned with political and economic purposes of efficiency and productivity rather than effectiveness and responsibility. Another reason researchers offered as to why teachers tend to avoid moral scrutiny of their work was due to keeping a positive self-image of their practice so they could face the day-to-day demands of their practice.

Berliner (1992) claims that few teachers reach a high level of expert functioning that allows them to attend to the moral aspects of their work. It is vital for teachers to engage in the kind of reflection that allows them to attach a moral screen of scrutiny to their work. If they miss that opportunity, they not only miss the opportunity to engage in their own moral development, but may miss opportunities to engage in the larger conversation of moral influence with those students they teach. The journey of moral development is an ongoing process, with the teacher serving as a starting point.

Arthur Holmes (2001, 1991) described moral formation as a threefold process: forming a sensitive conscience, moral decision-making, and forming a moral identity. He reminds us that while we seek to understand the world in absolutes, moral growth demands the ability to live with a lack of conclusiveness, to live with ambiguity. Our confidence does not rest with us but must rest with God. He encourages us to try and to fail while embracing the kind of flourishing that the Father had in mind for all of His children. In this vein, more than at a singular time of choice, moral growth comes into play not only at the time of decision making but in all those decisions in between the choices. He reminds us that moral growth is a matter of the *mind and heart.*

As teachers, we are called to a sensitive conscience toward the contexts of schools, families, classrooms, and those justice issues that relate to equity, access to knowledge, and opportunity. We are asked to think outside of the box, to question the *everydayness* of practice (Greene, 1984), and *to teach* *against-the-grain* (Cochran-Smith, 1992) to serve God's children. As Christians, Holmes (1991) reminds us that forming conscience is a matter of forming an authentic identity in Christ (p.58). He states that while valuing, decision making, and right conduct are important, there is a point of righteousness in which we must ask, "Who am I at the core of my very being?" He reminds, "Blessed are the pure of heart," who press toward good despite personal cost (p.58).

David Hansen provides a secular view of moral formation in the *Moral Heart of Teaching* (2001). He describes the quality of tenacious *humility* as that which demands the individual overcome the self in order to see the reality of others more clearly. Parker Palmer (2000), an educator who appeals to the higher ground of teaching motives and purposes, describes this process of moral formation as one of integrity. Palmer claims that it is as the habituation of virtue in which one's intentions become consistent with one's action. He writes: a "responsible agent is one in whom a habit of heart is taking root and virtue is developing"(p.62).

> "...moral growth comes into play not only at the time of decision making but in all those decisions in between the choices."

As educators who hope to shape the moral formation and intellectual development of our students, we need to be hope-filled. We need to come to the Cross to understand Christ's saving power in our life and that of others. As we begin with a self-inventory, we need to bravely assess the sources of moral influence in the classroom such as the overt curriculum, our manner, preferences in curriculum practice, and interaction with students. We need to be conscious of what we are about so that we can be intentional and purposeful in moral education.

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CACE News & Notes

Back in Print

■ This issue of *Discernment* marks the return of regular publication after a two-year hiatus. During this time, CACE sponsored numerous forums, debates, and conferences. We will be printing excerpts of these events in future issues.

New Publication Available

■ We are pleased to have had the proceedings of our spring 2001 conference published as *Must Christianity Be Violent?* by Brazos Press; check our website for details.

In Gratitude

■ This issue is partly funded by "The Lois Deicke Fund for Ethics Education." Lois was a cheerful giver whose philanthropy demonstrated a commitment to character formation. We are pleased to honor her legacy through this publication.

New Staff

■ Will Reaves has joined our staff as managing editor, allowing us to reestablish a regular publication schedule. We are fortunate for his work, which enables *Discernment* to continue making valuable contributions to the field of applied Christian ethics.

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