Section 3

Life Goals as a Framework for Character Education

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THE CONCEPT OF LIFE GOALS PROVIDES A LARGER PERSPECTIVE for conceptualizing character education. It provides a theoretical scaffolding that encompasses the diverse aims and methods of character education and shows their inter relatedness. Appealing to youth's imagination with attractive images of growth, relationships and creativity, a life goals framework allows teachers to fully articulate the "why" of good behavior. Moral ideals and goals point youth toward activities inherently worthy and rewarding. They provide long-range, meaningful motivation for character educators and students alike.

Chapter 10 discusses and illustrates the central axis of character education—the partnership between schools, parents and the community—and relates this to the three life goals of personal maturity, loving relationships and family and making a contribution. Character education that recognizes the importance of this three-way partnership is naturally compatible with a life goals orientation, as its efforts include the personal, interpersonal and public dimensions of life.

Chapters 11 to 13 consider current classroom and school methods in their supportive role to the development of character as a lifelong process. Teachers and educators are continuing and supplementing a process that preferably begins in the home; yet their efforts may at times provide ethical inspiration that has impact over a lifetime.

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Life Goals and the Partnership of Home, School and Community

Through all the daily transactions of family, school and neighborhood, young people [should] encounter a unified consensus of core values.

—William Damon

THE HOME, SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ARE CENTRAL FORCES for the cultivation of heart and character. Together, they form a powerful partnership. The perspective of three life goals—1) personal maturity, 2) loving relationships and family, and 3) contribution to society—speaks to the nature of this partnership and how it fosters the education of the whole person. When schools implement a life goals approach, they are naturally strengthening the relationship between these three strong influences and helping them to send a consistent moral message.

The first life goal is supported by schools' commitment to character development. The second life goal is cultivated by recognition of and facilitation of parental involvement in character and academic objectives. The third life goal is modeled by community service activities and creative school projects in conjunction with business, government, the

media and community agencies. Thus, the three life goals framework pulls together the three crucial elements of comprehensive character education—the home, school and community.

Toward the First Life Goal: School-Wide Character Education

School-wide character education means to intentionally provide opportunities for character development as an integral aspect of school life. When all members of the school community—faculty, staff, and students—share the commitment to character education, it leads to the creation of an ethos conducive to respectful and caring actions. For example, how respectfully and politely the students line up and take their food in the cafeteria, how they clean up after themselves, how they show respect for the cafeteria workers and how the cafeteria workers show respect for the students are all opportunities for training in character. In such ways, students have a consistent experience of moral concern throughout the school day, in and out of class.

Fostering the First Life Goal— School-Wide Character Ethos

- Planning and leadership for the character education initiative

- Public commitment to character

- Observable standards

- Balance between character goals and academic performance

- School-wide culture of character

- Time for moral learning

Planning and Leadership for the Character Education Initiative

School-wide character education begins with the process of planning where all stakeholders—including parents and representatives of the community—are involved and their concerns addressed. Sanford McDonnell and Esther Schaeffer, chairman and executive director of the Character Education Partnership, sent out a letter in early 2000 to all state governors and legislators across the country, offering suggestions on ways to ensure that character education is both effective and comprehensive. Among other guidelines, these character leaders emphasized influencing both school culture and academic curriculum. They also affirmed that planning should address "transformations of the school environment and classroom culture, revised curriculum, new teaching strategies, discipline, school procedures and evaluation of all grade levels."[1]

Leadership, professionalism, staff training, clear program expectations, communication and assessment are commonly affirmed as hallmarks of an effective character education initiative. David Wangaard, Director of the School for Ethical Education in Bridgeport, Connecticut, helps schools to begin the character education process, encouraging school leaders to consider a five-component model:[2]

1. Partnership Mission Statement and Role Modeling: Develop a mission statement that clearly states goals for all those involved in moral education and keeps the ultimate outcome constantly in focus. It may include specific behavioral and/or attitudinal goals for students.

2. Teacher and Staff Training: Schedule time for teacher and staff training in character education methodologies and techniques. Teachers also need a basic grounding in the moral developmental needs of children and training in cooperative learning and behavior management skills.

3. Curriculum and Project Activities: Provide students with consistent exposure and opportunities to learn, reflect upon and practice ethical values.

4. Assessment: Include assessment in regard to implementation as well as its impact on students and faculty. Character education efforts are best designed with evaluation and assessment in mind. Assessment may include both formal and informal activities—review of the school's baseline statistics, parent meetings, questionnaires, impromptu meetings, general observations, community service activities, and empirically based evaluations.

   5. *Principal Leadership:* Leadership from the school principal is essential. Supportive principals publicly demonstrate commitment to the school's character efforts and recognize worthy efforts of faculty, parents and community helpers.

Public Commitment to Character

   Many educators agree that a school's commitment to character should be intentional and public. This may take the form of a mission statement posted in the classrooms, hallways, and in printed materials. One reason for this is to counteract the negative effects of the "hidden curriculum." Daphne Paxton, principal of Cross Roads School from Georgia warns: "In many southern communities, the school is thought to exist so the inhabitants have athletic teams to support on Friday nights. The hidden curriculum then becomes one that produces winning teams. Character and academic development often get lost in the compelling pursuit of getting a winning team."[3] Every school has some sort of ethos, for better or for worse. Public commitment to character allows educators to gain control of this ethos and direct it to educative purposes.

   In a growing number of schools throughout the country, character traits are posted in classrooms, on bulletin boards in the hallways, and in the cafeteria. Elementary schools have incentive plans to recognize students displaying model behavior: posting their pictures in the cafeteria, treating them to lunch at a local restaurant, or having students read the morning announcements over the intercom. Motivational speakers reinforce the importance of good character. Brookside Elementary School in Binghamton, New York, has monthly assemblies promoting a particular virtue. The principal may read a story; students present skits, join in cheers or recite a pledge. "My kids are always talking about the assemblies," says one parent.[4]

   Buck Lodge Middle School of Prince George's County, Maryland, offers a daily closed-circuit television broadcast featuring "Dr. Character," who tends to the ethical questions common to adolescents. Questions are posed to the puppet character who becomes a focal point for peer discussions about a multitude of behavioral and attitudinal issues. Situations that arise when applying virtues are dealt with in a compelling way that gets the students talking and gives the teachers a point of reference to discuss virtue throughout the day.[6]

Observable Standards

When values are expressed in terms of concrete behavior, the entire school is more likely to be held accountable. Telling students and faculty to show respect means little if it is not explained in terms of actions. Explaining precisely to students how to greet elders or school administrators overcomes the ambiguity and variety of interpretations that can accompany and even obfuscate the norm of respect. When good character is modeled, it can be learned.

At the front door of Douglass Academy in Harlem, rules are laid down the instant students step inside. In the alcove are nine mirrors and several benches where students adjust ties, skirts and shirts and change from street sneakers into regulation black dress shoes. "At the front door, you set the tone for the entire school day," says Principal Hodge, who makes no apologies for his role as fashion cop. Appearance, he believes, means self-respect.[6]

The Character Plus program in St. Louis uses consensus building to identify good traits and behaviors. Parents, teachers, administrators, bus drivers, custodians, librarians, etc. come together for a series of meetings to decide on a manageable number of character traits, to prioritize them, define them and clarify the behaviors that exhibit them. Then they incorporate these into the mission statement and policies of the school and guidelines for each grade level.[7] The Traut Core Knowledge School, an alternative public school in Fort Collins, Colorado, uses a "Door to Door Handbook of Character Education" to describe for adults what student embodiment of the core values looks like, from the time of leaving home in the morning to arriving back in the afternoon.[8]

Character Balanced with Performance

Academic achievement is a primary means of character building. The Camden, New York, Middle School instituted an "I Can" program in which students set a goal to improve their grades in one or more courses and sign a pledge that is co-signed by a parent. In addition to the academic benefits, the experience of setting a goal and accomplishing it is a valuable character lesson.

Nevertheless, assessment, tracking and other aspects of academic evaluation need review in light of the ethos they support. Are effort and improvement recognized, or only the number of correct answers? Is

constructive risk-taking rewarded or punished? Are good grades trumpeted more than good character? A balance in emphasis can go a long way towards discouraging cheating and cutthroat competitiveness.

To make this character emphasis, the school leaders have to be careful to avoid an excessive focus on external achievements such as test scores. This is no easy task when teachers too often feel their main job is to get the students to pass the next round of state examinations. The subtle pressures for teachers to "teach for results" on standardized achievement tests often undermines the more important character and social development of students in the classroom. Yet a character focus can improve academic results. "We get more done because we have fewer disciplinary problems," says Camden Middle School principal Vicki Mace.[9]

School-Wide Culture of Character

A teacher can best foster character growth in her classroom by promoting a caring environment and at the same time requiring that her students be morally accountable. This principle applies throughout the school. Any disparity between the warm feeling of a favored teacher's classroom and coldness or downright hostility in the rest of the building is not lost on students, especially adolescents. The young readily revert to selfishness when the environment seems to demand it. This is a special challenge in large institutions, which tend to be impersonal.

Consistency of standards applies throughout the whole school community. "The character of the adult community" is the third of three pillars of the character education Responsive Classroom™ project of the Northeast Foundation for Children, after curriculum and the school climate. Co-founder Chip Wood describes the challenge: "This issue is probably the crux of the matter. As in most professions, we in education have been focused largely on a 'client-centered' approach... We have done all this without really looking closely in the mirror. What is it like in the teachers' room?"[10]

In families, the relationship between parents greatly influences the spirit of the home. In the same way, the most confronting reality for administration and faculty is not what the students do, but how the adults treat each other. Educator Roland Barth remarks, "Four years of public schooling... and ten years as a principal... convince me that the nature of the relationships among adults who inhabit a school has more

to do with a school's quality and character, with the professionalism of its teachers, than any other factor." Barth noticed that when staff improved their interaction, they tended to be more caring toward students. He found that after establishing a character initiative, staff no longer left office equipment broken without reporting it. Even staff members who did not like each other began to treat each other with respect.[11]

Creating a consistent, school-wide culture of character requires attention to the typically unsupervised and unstructured areas where the worst demonstrations of anti-social behavior are too often the norm. These areas include the school bus, hallways, study halls, bathrooms, playground and cafeteria. When standards of propriety are brought into these outside-the-classroom areas, they enhance a positive school ethos that is supportive of character. The fundamental objective is to cultivate within students the essence of Lord Macaulay's comment that "the measure of a man's real character is what he would do if he knew he would never be found out." Otherwise, these areas often become negative pockets of fear and abuse. A classroom reminder that "The pen is mightier than the sword" can be neutralized by a lunch table experience that asserts that "Might makes right."

In Tonawanda, New York, the bus drivers in the district formed a committee to implement a values education program. They posted signs on the buses stating that these were "positive buses," and some of the drivers began teaching bus safety and conduct in the primary classrooms. Mindful of the need to recognize all members of the school community, the bus drivers organized a "Caring Day." They gave out pieces of green ribbon to all the students and asked them to give the ribbon to an adult in the building who showed them care and concern. Students gave the ribbons to secretaries, cafeteria workers, guidance counselors and teachers, who wore them proudly.[12]

Time Dedicated to Character

Weaving moral discussion into daily life is an invaluable part of character education. Yet there is also merit in devoting some time for exclusive exploration into morality, ethics and meaning. In the realm of formal education, besides that which arises in religion classes at parochial schools, some schools choose to dedicate periods of time or specific courses to character education.

The Kimberley Academy in Montclair, New Jersey, has a general morality and ethics course in each grade. Students learn about ethical traditions and are coached in moral reasoning skills. Allotting time for such courses is more common in China, Russia and other countries where what once were ideological political indoctrination classes on all grade levels are now yearlong character education classes, and new character education curricula have been developed for them.

Many schools allow a short time daily for reflection, often at the start of the day. It is commonly focused on a specific theme or character trait. Principal, teachers, and students may address the entire school through the public announcement system. In this way, the Buck Lodge Middle School introduces a virtue on Mondays and explores positive and negative experiences related to the virtue on Tuesdays. A community guest comes in to discuss its practical application on Wednesdays, while Thursdays bring narrations about historical role models. On Fridays, students present projects showing an understanding and application of the virtue.

Toward the Second Life Goal: Home and School Partnership

The school and the home are natural partners in character education, since these contexts dominate a young person's most formative years. Attitudes and discipline gained in the home affect success at school, while the demands of school influence home life. Over 90 percent of Americans believe that public schools should share with families in the responsibility of teaching universally held values such as respect and responsibility.[13] When teachers are asked what single most important improvement could be made in education, they invariably cite greater parental involvement and cooperation.[14] The National Association of Elementary School Principals NAESP "strongly urges the formation of 'home-school partnership programs.'"

Researcher Michael Rutter found that good schools resemble good homes.[15] In particular, a comprehensive character-building environment in a school holds some similar features to a home with a strong moral ethos. (See Chapter 12) In those cases where the home is not working well, the school ethos provides a measure of compensation, showing what a positive and caring atmosphere looks like.

Fostering the Second Life Goal— Home and School Partnership

- Respectful and frequent communication between teachers and parents

- Parent collaboration in the school's character education program

- Parent engagement in character lessons in school and at home

- Cooperation against destructive influences

- Family activities at schools

- Parent cohort groups

- Parenting education seminars at schools

Communication

Respectful and frequent communication between teachers and parents helps to foster mutual trust and good will. Some teachers take the time to call parents in early September, thus starting the year positively. Susan Pelis of Greenfield Center School in Greenfield, Massachusetts, engages parents at the start of the year with "book bags." These bags hold the student's storybook that is read in class by day and is finished with the parent at night. This simple device strengthens the bond between school and home.[16] Teachers in School No. 2 in Kamenka, Russia, pass along information through a notebook, which includes comments and scores on behavior, attitude and grades. If a disciplinary problem arises, the teacher has a greater chance of winning the sympathy of parents if a dialogue as already been established.

The Internet is providing new ways for families and teachers to communicate with one another. America Online's Family Education Network is a service that allows teachers and students to create their

own secure websites. Through this medium, teachers involve parents in the daily life of their class by posting homework assignments, class activities, academic goals and even student grades. Teachers and parents exchange comments and ideas daily by e-mail.

One of the most striking examples of home and school cooperation is the Jefferson Junior High School in Washington, D.C., located in a district beset with teenage pregnancy, violence crime and drugs. It was able to turn things around with an award-winning character education initiative, the key to which was setting high expectations for parents. Parents are required to come to school for Back-to-School Night and to parent-teacher conferences during the year. Parents are also asked to volunteer twenty hours of service to the school each year.

Collaboration in Planning and Implementation of School Programs

Schools can encourage direct parental involvement in the planning and implementation of character efforts. The Character Plus program brings parents into the planning process from the very beginning—to meet, reflect, develop goals, define desirable character traits, and develop school policies. This process typically takes a year or more, but the wide consensus it builds makes it worthwhile.

"It is not top-down management, but truly a collaborative process. As a result, teachers, parents and neighbors of the school feel like stakeholders; they have ownership," said B.R. Rhoads, Principal of Bristol Elementary School in Connecticut. "We learned that it has a lot to do with compromise. Our communities include right-wing groups, liberals and people who find themselves somewhere on the continuum between these two poles."[17]

The Benjamin Franklin Charter School in Franklin, Massachusetts, has parental involvement as one of its four pillars.[18] A parents' committee actively helps plan and troubleshoot their character education efforts. In addition, teachers send home a curriculum description for all grades with suggestions as to where parents may be helpful, such as teaching a section, providing background information or sharing experiences from different cultures. The school also sends home Family Readings Suggestions, a list of books to complement that month's character focus, as well as Family Service Suggestions—ideas for the practice of virtue at home and in the neighborhood.[19]

One of the benefits of a solid character building effort is the greater willingness of parents to volunteer at school. At Kennedy Middle School in Eugene, Oregon, parents were reluctant to volunteer for lunchroom monitoring or much of anything else due to serious student discipline problems. After three years of a character focus, parent participation became so high that one parent serves almost as a fulltime volunteer to coordinate it all.[20]

Parental Engagement in Character Lessons

A character education program can increase parental involvement through engaging them in their children's lessons. English teachers might assign students to ask their parents what person has had the greatest impact on their lives and why. Students may write a short essay on a parent's hero, or ask a parent to share about a challenge they faced and overcame. This idea is popular with parents, as it facilitates meaningful conversation and offers occasions for passing on important values to their children. In homes where a parent asserting his values only provokes emotionally charged conflicts, it provides a neutral context in which children can learn their parents' point of view and engage in reasoned reflection.[21]

When Jeff's ninth-grade economics teacher assigned the class to interview their grandparents about life during the Great Depression, Jeff discovered that his grandparents, who now owned a mansion and a golf-range on their extensive property, had suffered greatly, sometimes going without food. This was quite a surprise for the teenager. When he interviewed his grandmother, she could barely speak about it without sobbing. "Hard times. Hard times," she said, and went on to describe daily life. Now a graduate student, Jeff recalls this assignment as one of his most memorable ones.[22]

An innovative approach in School No. 10 in Novotalitsa, Russia, invites parents into classrooms to observe and participate in moral lessons.[23] Larisa Schmakova, a seventh-grade teacher, asked both the students and their parents to write down the names of each family member and list things that they were learning from and teaching to that person. When parents and children compared their lists, it generated both humor and insight. Parents were surprised by the youngsters' views and experiences. Students learned something new by hearing their parents' images of responsibility. The exercise promoted per-

spective taking and generated meaningful conversations between students and parents.

Cooperation against Destructive Influences

Parental guidance regarding use of alcohol, tobacco and other substances is one of the critical factors in helping youth avoid destructive habits. School counselors provide invaluable support by coaching parents in how to discuss sensitive topics with their children.

Parents often appreciate school support in controlling and limiting television viewing. Some schools have participated in a national "Turn It Off" or "Pull the Plug" week where families voluntarily give up television for a week. In general, the response is positive. One mother said that during that week without television her son developed a lasting interest in reading. Another mother commented that without the anesthetizing effect of television, her children fought more, but they fought more fairly. Some families reported not missing television at all and became busy with other interests. Many families reported a heightened awareness of how television watching had taken an excessive toll on their family life.

Family Activities at School

Schools also might sponsor appealing parent and family initiatives. Brookside Elementary School invites families to come to the school for PTA-planned games and crafts once a month.[24] On a recent Valentine's Day the school sponsored a father-daughter dance night. This was one of its most popular events, where fathers and daughters had an unusual opportunity to connect in a positive way.

Hazelwood Elementary School of Louisville, Kentucky, sponsors evenings that bring families together to participate in enjoyable, interactive activities. On Family Science night, parents do hands-on science activities with their children. On Family Reading night, parents and children read together in small groups, and on Family Arts and Crafts Night, parents and children work together on a craft.[25]

At Kennedy Middle School, parents are encouraged to stop in and have lunch with their children whenever possible. "One father arranged his work schedule so he could eat lunch here every Thursday," says Kay Mehas, director of school services. She emphasizes to parents that their presence is needed in middle school even more than when the

children were younger. "Students are figuring out where they fit into society. When they see you at school, it sends them a message about your priorities."[26]

Many schools have designated a Grandparents Day, which is an opportunity for older family and community members to share their wisdom and to experience the school and community's respect and appreciation.[27] "Grandparents and Books" is a national program that brings seniors to children in the library. Don and Rosemarie Sparling are among the many senior volunteers who host young visitors to the school library after school, sitting and reading a book together. "Most of these children have no money, they have no place to be after school and they need to know that someone really cares about them," says Rosemarie. "I feel like she's really my grandma," says Sean Cortez, 7.[28]

Parent Peer Groups and Parenting Education

Certain schools have formed parent peer groups which meet periodically either in the school or in parents' homes. This is a response to the reality that many parents find little time to socialize with other parents and may have never met the parents of their children's friends. When they meet in organized peer groups, they often compare notes with each other and determine mutual standards on such matters as bedtimes, permissible movies and television programs, and dating. Parents work together to plan events for the school and community, and support each other by reinforcing their commitment to good values.[29] The schools participating in the Child Development Project in California have parent groups that help families implement the same character goals affirmed in the classroom.[30]

Some schools offer parenting programs to help parents improve their discipline and communication skills. Others offer workshops about the parents' role in building up their child's character. The Los Angeles Parent Institute for Quality Education offers a nine-week course, taught in both the morning and evening to accommodate working parents.[31] The Easterling Primary School in Marion, South Carolina, provides a variety of workshops for parents on topics ranging from discipline to the content and methodology of their character education program.[32] The school has a parent resource center with books and tapes on child development and character education that is open to all families. The school also makes house calls that strengthen the home-school liaison.

The Mt. Lebanon School District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania developed the Parent Education Action Plan. In the fall, they present a six-part series devoted to several elements of character education, such as the stages of moral development, and skills and strategies for helping children recognize and adopt core values. They also dispense parenting advice. During the spring term, a series of single topics extend the subjects introduced earlier. These include the father's role in moral development, media literacy, the acquisition of virtues and discipline.[33]

Through such education, parents can gain valuable insights and skills. They become aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and as a result strive to better themselves for their own sake as well as that of their child. They can also learn to have higher ethical expectations of their children. Hearing teachers tell about how fifth grade children gave up a Saturday to clean out a trash-laden river, or that a group of high school students are volunteering to tutor the learning disabled encourages parents to believe in their child's moral potential.

Toward the Third Life Goal:
Community Partnership

Aristotle taught that people become virtuous by participating in the life of a moral community. Likewise, communities become moral through the cultivation of virtuous individuals. Schools and communities nurture each other's moral ethos in a variety of ways. Schools fulfill their primary obligation to society through supporting student's individual moral growth into worthy citizens. Likewise, schools can harness community involvement in support of its moral education goals. Drug abuse prevention and community health experts,[34] social workers, family therapists[35] and character educators[36] all agree that promoting prosocial behavior among the young requires community modeling and multifaceted learning opportunities in the community.

Schools enhance the promotion of character when they recruit the help of local community groups—businesses, youth organizations, service organizations, social organizations, local government, and the media.[37] Likewise, the community supports character efforts of the school by promoting service opportunities, values in the workplace, civics and environmental conservation.

Fostering the Third Life Goal—Community Partnership

- Partnership between school and business
- Media involvement
- Local government participation

Partnership between School and Business

In 1994, Walter Segaloff of Newport News, Virginia, decided that businesspeople needed to help the schools, government and churches with the job of education. He established the award-winning An Achievable Dream Academy, a public school for at-risk children, which partners with businesses and non-profit organizations in a program called "job shadowing."[38] For two weeks in the summer, seventh and eighth-grade students volunteer to help in local workplaces. The work connects the youngsters—most of whom have only one parent or guardian—to mentors in local hospitals, colleges and universities, in law firms and science laboratories. Though the practical benefits are apparent, "the primary purpose of this program is to develop the relationship between students and mentors," says Richard Coleman, principal.[39]

Business representatives perform a helpful service when they speak in schools about how ethical practices pay off in greater productivity and personal advancement at work. This is regular feature at the James E. McDade Classical School in Chicago, which emphasizes using real life to reinforce good values.[40] Easterling Primary School invites business leaders to serve as role models and tutors to their students.

Media Involvement

Schools have recruited local news media to publicize its core values and promote examples of character in daily life. In collaboration with St. Louis's citywide character education effort, the local CBS affiliate television station produces a Saturday morning program on storytelling for young children, emphasizing good character traits. In that same city, the local newspaper in conjunction with the local police

department joined with Character Plus in a project called "Do the Right Thing." This program recognizes young children who are setting an example of service in their community.

The local newspaper in Binghamton, New York, features a "Character Corner" that highlights the Brookside Elementary School's designated virtue of the month. Senior citizens look forward to the feature and express their support. Once a week a community television station airs a student-written "Character Minute" on the evening news.[41]

Local Government Participation

The Utah Project, a statewide character education initiative, gives children practice in participating in public forums. They learn the rules of decorum and respectful debate and gain practice in good citizenship. This initiative has also fostered partnerships between schools and local governments.[42]

At the An Achievable Dream Academy, soldiers from nearby Fort Eustis actively mentor youngsters. After leading the 90-minute morning ceremonies for third through fifth graders, the soldiers spend time in classrooms helping with teaching, disciplining or simply listening and offering advice.[43] The Yu Ying Middle School in Beijing, China partners with the army in a preventative approach to discipline that helps set the tone for courteous relations among teachers and peers. During the first week of the academic year, seventh and tenth-grade students train and drill with the soldiers. They learn proper bearing and manners. In the process, they come to appreciate and make friends with their mentors in uniform, who also perform many functions in the community. Parents attend the event at the end of the week for a report and celebration.

"We are a community of character" is emblazoned on the police cars of Lombard, Illinois, reflecting the training officers have received. [44] Reflecting the character education initiative in local schools, a police department in Wake County, North Carolina, developed a program that employed police and community members as role models for youth. The result was a halving of the juvenile court referrals after just two years. The county park and recreation department integrated virtues into their summer program so that all 5000 youngsters participating received similar messages, ones that echoed what they heard in schools.[45]

In these and myriad other ways, the basic human aspirations for personal maturity, thriving families and a healthy society are served when young people's characters are formed through the concerted efforts of home, school and community. Yet these three life goals also frame a variety of educational methodologies employed in the character-building classroom and school-wide efforts. The following chapters demonstrate how methods of character education can be understood as fostering one or another of these basic life purposes.

11

Fostering Character in the Classroom

COMPREHENSIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION EMPLOYS DIVERSE methods to cultivate moral maturity in each student. Most character educators support eclectic approaches for reaching the whole person. When teachers create a moral ecosystem within their own classroom, replete with explicit and implicit moral reasoning, stories, problem solving strategies, self-evaluation and rewards for mastery, they equip students to fulfill the first life goal of personal maturity.

A mature person will, without supervision, intrinsically desire, decide to do, and come to embody what is right, true and good. Therefore, fostering personal maturity involves cultivating the student's inner *telos* toward "a higher self," integrity, or a moral identity. When students see themselves in relation to the moral ideal of personhood, it facilitates gaining mastery over academic as well as personal challenges.

Methods that Foster Personal Maturity

- Utilizing the entire curriculum
- Lifting up unifying character themes
- Lessons through stories
- Accountability
- Encouraging self-discipline
- Setting high and consistent expectations
- Joint rule-making
- Opportunities for moral reasoning and moral imagination
- Socratic questioning
- Skills for solving interpersonal problems
- Self-evaluation
- Constructing a moral identity
- Facing physical challenges

Utilizing the Entire Curriculum

How can today's curricula, filled to the bursting-point with information, properly guide students to live exemplary and noble lives, leading them to realize the importance of aspiring to mature character? Educators Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin have observed:

> There is a danger of churning out students who are rapid processors of information but may not necessarily be more reflective, thoughtful, and able to give sustained consideration to the information that matters most. When students

aren't engaged by the curriculum in school, they are more likely to be seduced by the culture of easy pleasure and instant gratification.[1]

Often curriculum itself is an excellent opportunity for a thoughtful teacher to illustrate life's moral lessons in compelling ways. Teaching values through the curriculum entails highlighting the moral issues and values within class subjects.

History offers endless opportunities to highlight heroes and villains, the moral choices they faced, and the consequences of their choices. The social studies class might explore the centrality of personal responsibility in the functioning of democracy. Jack Lapolla, the director of Social Studies at Wilton High School in Connecticut, encourages students to identify the clash of values behind many of the turning points of American history, "so that students don't get the idea that Lincoln's primary motivation was economic."[2] A talk by a real-life war veteran teaches children that their country did not come cheaply, engendering the virtue of gratitude. Current events provide opportunities for class discussions on ethical issues such as how personal morality relates to public service.[3]

Science students in Buck Lodge Middle School draw parallels between the interactions among organisms necessary to maintain a viable ecosystem and those of responsible people in a caring community.[4] A math teacher at Hazelwood Elementary School poses ethical problems: "What would you do with the extra money if you received $9.75 from a $20 bill for an $11.25 purchase?"[5] A business course may include a discussion with local businesspersons about practical issues involved in doing business honestly and making ethical decisions in their professions.

At Mountain Pointe High School, Phoenix, Arizona, students in Evan Anderson's writing class write reflective essays on a subject of character. Atlantis Elementary School in Cocoa, Florida, does the same with younger students. "We read a character quote every morning and that often becomes a writing prompt," says principal Linda Mace. The children also analyze literature based on the highlighted virtues. "The kids start these discussions. They start looking for the pillars in stories."[6]

Character education infused into the curriculum also has the advantage of avoiding the appearance of repetition, says Art Dillon, principal of the Traut Core Knowledge School. Students may encounter

the same core virtues each year, but they experience them in a fresh way since they are embedded in different content each time.[7]

Lifting Up Unifying Character Themes

Ethical themes transcend individual subjects; hence they are usefully employed across the entire curriculum.[8] For example, the theme of interdependence that is studied in biology in relation to the web of life, and in global studies through an examination of the world economy, can also be lifted up in English class through a novel that views the complex interaction between lives. It is a theme that naturally brings up issues of empathy, responsibility for others and respect for nature.

Another approach is to prominently feature one virtue throughout the various disciplines. If self-mastery is the virtue of choice, classes in science, mathematics, art and music can draw attention to great figures in their field and the self-mastery they needed to become proficient. Physical education and health classes can stress how self-mastery is necessary to keep a fit and healthy body. History teachers can point out great examples of this virtue in the past. English classes can find similar examples in literature, and students can write about their successes and experiences in making that virtue a reality in their own lives.[9]

Lessons through Stories

Stories from good literature and historical narratives are emotionally compelling and appeal to children's natural interest in exploring the dramatic possibilities of life. Even reluctant readers begin to devour well-written stories, becoming lively participants in discussions about topics that spark their imaginations.

In the area of children's education, psychologist Bruno Bettleheim praised the value of fairy tales and stories of heroes. They teach that, "a struggle against severe difficulties in life is unavoidable...if one does not shy away, but steadfastly meets unexpected and often unjust hardships, one masters all obstacles and at the end emerges victorious."[10] On the primary level, *The Little Engine That Could* demonstrates the values of perseverance, courage and caring for others, while *Aesop's Fables* teaches the values of prudence, moderation and hard work. At the middle school level, *King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table* demonstrates the values of courage and courtesy, Anne Frank's *Diary of a Young Girl* inculcates an unforgettable lesson in compassion, and *The*

Odyssey teaches courage, dedication and commitment to family.

Stories can be encounters with real-life heroes, too. The Giraffe Project's "storybank" is a resource for teachers containing over 800 stories of ordinary people who became heroes. These are people whose courage and compassion made a difference to others. Among them are Sarah Swagart, who decided it was wrong for young skateboarders to be treated unfairly with fines as high as $500 for skating in parking lots and sidewalks. She spearheaded efforts to get the town to build a skateboarding park. Another is Hazel Wolf, who started working in 1911 to gain equality for women before moving on to fight for civil rights and fair work laws. She was still publishing an environmental newspaper and fundraising for environmental causes until shortly before she died at age 101.[11]

Young people naturally want to identify with heroic and successful people. Tales from good literature and history are storehouses of role models to emulate—and villains to be repelled by—that are remembered as they encounter difficulties in their own lives. They thus help them to make better choices. Great literature is true to the human condition. Thus, it speaks to the human heart with the voice of truth beyond time and place.

Moral Discipline for Self-Authorship

Moral discipline involves utilizing rules, limits and accountability procedures as an impetus to practicing good habits and experiencing the satisfaction of self-authored moral growth. Ultimately it is not merely a means of enforcing order in the home or classroom. Discipline is best employed to aid people in designing their character toward a self-defined moral ideal. This approach implies going beyond external motivators such as prizes or awards towards ultimately instilling in children self-discipline and a personal commitment to respecting rules, defending the rights of others, and loyalty to home, school and community.

Moreover, discipline that promotes the youngster's inner growth as well as control of behavior improves the quality of the teacher-student relationship by imposing a structure and direction on the relationship. When authority is exercised with the proper combination of firmness and warm-heartedness, people feel cared for. They tend to

give admiration in return. They are more likely to believe that the rules have value for them, obey them willingly, and internalize them. This is a basic principle of effective parenting. (See Chapter 22)

Accountability

Fundamental to this process is holding youth accountable for their words and behavior, conveying that actions have consequences and promises mean something. Effective teachers set up and enforce consequences in a manner that lets students understand why unacceptable behavior violates the standard of integrity and respect. Moral psychologists know that children respond better to correction when adults point out how breaking a rule hurts someone.[12] It helps children develop empathy and realize that rules exist to protect people.

High-school teacher and author Hal Urban invites a student who has broken a rule during class to sit at a certain table to write out how he or she may have violated the principle of treating others as one would like to be treated. Thus, the student dialogues with him or herself to prod the conscience and help sharpen moral reasoning. The Marion Intermediate School has young students write out a Responsibility Plan to help correct misbehavior and avoid punishment. "We want to keep the focus on good behavior rather than coercing them into behaving," says principal Rick Menzer.

High and Consistent Expectations

Setting high expectations conveys to young people their value and potential for becoming good citizens. Lax discipline that accommodates poor behavior sells them short, implying that society does not expect much from them. The children with special emotional, mental and physical needs at Atlantis Elementary used to be the toughest group to discipline. But then, says principal Linda Mace, "the more I bragged about these kids, the more their behavior started to drastically change.... They are the pride and joy of the building instead of the 'most difficult.'"[13]

A policy of setting consistent expectations throughout the school reinforces the efforts of individual teachers. Chip Wood remarks, "Consistency around rules and discipline provides all the children with a sense of safety and security when behavior becomes an issue.... Consistency in discipline procedures helps teachers to know exactly what the 'fall-back' position is for them and the precise steps to take

when they find themselves in a power struggle with a student. Consistency on the part of all adults in the building...enhances the spirit and cooperative engagement of the adult community in carrying out its mission to teach and care for the children in the school."[14]

Joint Rule-Making

An effective strategy to promote moral discipline is to have students set some of the rules for the classroom themselves. Young people have a strong intuitive grasp of the need for rules, and by making rules they gain a sense of ownership over the rules and their own moral choices. They often come up with innovative and effective rules—sometimes more strict than what adults would do on their own.

Patty Brody, a second-grade teacher in Syracuse, New York, became frustrated at the end of each day as the children rushed to the coat closet as a chaotic herd—pushing, shoving, jumping over each other and exchanging angry words as they tried to find their coats and mittens. She posed a question at a class meeting, "How can we, working together, solve this problem?" After brainstorming possible solutions, the class decided to assign everyone a hook, which they would use to put their things. Brody then questioned how they would make sure that everyone did this. One girl suggested that if someone did not put their things where they belonged, they would have to keep them at their desk during the next day. Brody then drew up a class agreement, had each of her thirty-four children sign it, and posted it next to the coat closet. After adopting this plan, the trip to the coat closet was an orderly and cordial one.[15]

When students help make the rules—under the guidance of the teacher—and agree to a certain consequence if the rule is broken, they are less likely to resent the teacher for enforcing that consequence and more inclined to assume responsibility. Here is an opportunity for lessons in citizenship, linking class rules with the laws of the community.

Moral Reflection

Moral reflection is the area of character development that involves encouraging the capacity for right thinking about moral issues. It includes being morally aware: knowing the virtues and what they require of people in concrete situations. It involves being able to reason moral-

ly—to understand why some actions are ethically better than others. Moral reflection also encompasses being able to make thoughtful moral decisions, to use the moral imagination to consider alternatives, consequences and the values at stake. It requires being able to take the perspective of others—the cognitive side of empathy—and recognize their strengths and vulnerabilities.[16] It also includes self-knowledge and the capacity for self-criticism.

Opportunities for Moral Reasoning and Moral Imagination

Moral reasoning is encouraged when students encounter moral issues in daily life, current events and historical situations. Exercises that afford opportunities for dialogue and role-playing encourage students to consider different perspectives, note their consequences, and craft their own position.

Games and group exercises can be employed to bring out students' moral imagination. At a teacher-training seminar in Ivanova, Russia, teachers divide into groups and spend an hour preparing skits, poems and stories about love, responsibility, good and evil, marriage, friendship, etc.—themes found in the moral education texts. They perform them at the evening's program. Teachers new to these methods begin to experience for themselves the value of encouraging creativity and creating an atmosphere of genuine caring in a moral education classroom.

Class discussions and debates can develop moral reasoning. Mrs. Paulson's sixth-grade class at Dundee Middle School debated the heroism or cowardice of the adolescent character in *The Red Badge of Courage* who runs from his first battle, pretends he is wounded to be reinstated into his company, and goes on to become a seasoned soldier. One side of the class had to maintain that he was not a true hero; the other side had to maintain that he was. The debate reached fever pitch, with emotions running high. At the peak of the conflict, the teacher suddenly shouted, "Switch sides!" The students had to physically shift their desks to the opposite side of the room and rethink their positions from the opposite point of view. They gained new tolerance and respect for the opinions of others as they struggled to come up with reasons to support the side they had initially opposed.

Moral reasoning methods are effective even for elementary school children. When asked to figure out what a storybook character should

do when faced with a tough choice, their responses will range from noble and altruistic to selfish and calculating. But when asked what's the *right* thing to do, children usually know what's right; they simply need the confidence and the encouragement to reason it out and to act on it.

Teachers at the Atlantis Elementary School cultivate youngsters' moral reasoning through the use of a reminder list:

> "Before you make a choice, ask yourself:
> - What does my conscience say about it?
> - Could it hurt anyone, including me?
> - Is it fair?
> - Would it violate the Golden Rule?
> - Have I been told it is wrong?
> - Deep down, how do I feel about this decision?"[17]

Socratic Questioning

The Socratic method of questioning is a time-honored method to stimulate higher reasoning. A simple inquiry about what would happen if a movie character chose an alternative course or why a particular action of a figure in the news is good or bad enlightens the moral imagination.

David Elkind, who produces a series of videos that stimulate Socratic dialogue, cautions that in issues involving right and wrong it is important to guide students to the right conclusion rather than allowing them to think that whatever they conclude is acceptable. Anybody can give a simple, unsupported answer, but asking a student to justify an answer forces reflection and analysis—which often results in the student modifying his or her initial position. Questions that stimulate thoughtful responses include, "What would you think of a character in a movie who made the same choice?" "How would you feel if someone else acted that way toward you?" and "Why or why not?"[18]

Owning Values through Peer Dialogue

The EQUIP program[19] is a peer-helping approach to moral development used effectively for youth at risk in detention centers such as Teylengerind, a prison for young male adolescents in Holland. EQUIP utilizes a group setting where participants learn first to make "I" statements, think about consequences of behavior, identify negative thought patterns—such as the victim syndrome—and begin to think of the pain their antisocial behavior has caused others. The final stage of the program is for the group to learn to make fair social decisions through discussing real-life moral dilemmas that they face. The goal is to come to a morally mature unanimous decision on what *ought* to be done. For example:

Alonzo is walking along a side street with his friend Rodney. Rodney stops in front of a beautiful new sports car. Rodney looks inside and then exclaims, "Look, the keys are still in this thing! Let's see what it can do! Come on, let's go!"

What should Alonzo say or do?

Should Alonzo try to persuade Rodney not to steal the car?

What if Rodney says to Alonzo that anyone who is that careless to leave the keys in the car deserves to be ripped off! Should Alonzo try to persuade Rodney not to steal the car?

Jan van Westerlaak, an EQUIP trainer finds that most of the time the majority of the group comes up with the more mature answer, although many viewpoints are discussed. The majority then is encouraged to convince the minority through discussion and argumentation. The goal of these meetings is to make a fair decision that a majority can agree with. By establishing peer helping as a foundation for cognitively based character education, the EQUIP meetings seek both to motivate and to teach young people how to help one another think and act responsibly.

Skills for Solving Interpersonal Problems

Many schools have incorporated programs dealing with violence prevention, conflict resolution, peer mediation and interpersonal problem solving to help resolve situations that invoke intense feelings of anger, frustration and alienation among students. These programs empower students and teachers with skills and techniques that keep tensions from escalating into unmanageable crises. They are also preventative measures against future troubles as communication and understanding among disputing parties often improves.

"I Can Problem Solve" is an interpersonal problem-solving model that teaches students how to think before problems occur in relationships.[20] It provides short twenty-minute lessons, incorporating games, stories, puppets and role-play. Teachers guide students through the problem-solving practice sessions in elementary classrooms. The "Second Step Violence Prevention Curriculum" targets pre-K through middle school students and uses a lesson format that addresses empathy, impulse control, and anger management.[21] These models teach preparatory techniques for problem solving as well as problem-solving strategies.

Researcher Gordon Vessels maintains that emotional readiness and the multi-step process of interpersonal problem solving are best taught within the context of a comprehensive character education program emphasizing self control, an awareness of others' feelings and social skills training in the early grades. Formal peer mediation introduced in the fourth grade can be based on the lessons learned through teacher-led practice sessions in earlier grades. These kinds of programs, Vessels concludes, fulfill their potential as part of a character education initiative, and not as isolated "add-on" lessons.[22]

Self-Evaluation

Coaching in moral reflection includes helping youth observe and evaluate themselves. Jack was running for a class position sponsored by the student newspaper at Highland Park Middle School. He was also editor of the paper, and thus was in charge of counting the votes. He had voted for the other candidate, thinking it would be immodest to vote for himself. Nevertheless, when he counted the votes, he found he was tied for the position. Remembering his parents saying that political candidates always voted for themselves, Jack then decided to change his

vote. He voted for himself and won the election. Later, however, he felt conscience-stricken. A teacher helped him walk through the reasons why what he did was wrong. He came up with, "I had the opportunity to change my vote, but the other students didn't have the same chance. If they'd had, maybe they would have changed their votes too, and I wouldn't have won." Painful as it was, Jack decided to rescind his position.[23]

Through learning how to evaluate their own thinking process, young people are empowered to anticipate and resist temptations as well as avoid tempting others. When teasing started to become hurtful in a kindergarten class in Montclair Kimberley Academy, the teacher read a poem, "Teasing," that helped her students reflect on their experience. They realized that the person doing the teasing easily forgets about it, but the hurt person stays wounded a long time. The class then all agreed to be more careful about teasing in the future.[24]

Students at the Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter School are encouraged to better internalize and make a commitment to virtues through reflections in their character education journals. The focus of their writing is on three reflective questions: "What have I done today to put this virtue into practice?" "How have I failed to practice this virtue?" and "What can I do better tomorrow?" In the same vein, Youth Opportunities Unlimited, a public school for teenagers in trouble with the law in San Diego, California, uses a racetrack as the metaphor for a constructive direction. When students create a disciplinary problem— go "off track"—they reflect in writing about where they went wrong, how they could have avoided it, and what undesirable consequences might result from their misstep. Then they list three things they can do to stay on track next time.[25] Such exercises coach young minds to think about their behavior and its consequences. They teach the valuable skill of revisiting a provocative situation and thinking out alternative and more constructive courses of action.

Constructing a Moral Identity

Teenagers are particularly prone to challenge the parent or teacher with, "Why should I be honest?"—or good, generous, or any other virtue. Younger children are easily motivated to please adults; older children need to find deeper motivation to fully realize their moral potential. "We've got everything in our lives, but no purpose behind them," says

Bill Saul, age 18. "A kid will be willing to go all out for a purpose he is needed for, if it is big enough." Teenagers are naturally attracted to themes of personal development, friendships and marriage, and career. They are also innately idealistic and oriented toward romanticism, exhibiting a desire to participate in a heroic story. They want and need to see morality and ethics in light of these concerns.

Constructing a moral "life story" for oneself is perhaps one of the most potent forces in forming character over a lifespan.[26] Italian educator Pablo Paolicchi reminds teachers that students are simultaneously "characters that have lived their own stories" as well as "authors of their stories" that "influence their further development."[27] Classroom reflection on ethics provides perspective for students as they construct their personal narratives and endow them with meaning. Developing an ethical perspective on their life's journey encourages youth not to simply follow someone else's morality, but to practice living out of a consciously constructed moral narrative framework.

In addition, a wholesome self-image and a goal-orientation toward life can be mutually supportive in defining and developing character.[28] Researchers find motivation to achieve concrete goals increases when teenagers are behaving in ways that reflect or fulfill the needs of their self-image.[29] The inner recognition that "I am a reliable, hard-working student" provides impetus toward activities that reflects these inner qualities.[30]

Overcoming Physical Hardships

Man versus nature is one of the most common themes behind thrilling adventures in compelling short stories and novels. Dealing with trials presented by an environment that cannot be fully tamed has always been a character-building exercise. Nature is powerful, unpredictable and offers innumerable physical and mental challenges.

Adventure learning is the name given to supervised experiences in nature designed to foster character growth. The adventure might be an elaborate exercise through an obstacle course for a group of teenagers supervised by skilled staff, as in the Outward Bound program, or a simple weekend canoe trip in the wilderness. The key element of adventure learning is facing uncertainty and real or perceived danger, usually in a group setting. Through adventure, the participants

face their deepest fears, discover what it means to need and be needed by others, and even confront the meaning of their lives.[31]

Experiences of physical challenge foster ruggedness and resourcefulness, countering the softness and complacency that accompany city life where there are few natural hardships. Ironically, the experience can also promote appreciation for modern comforts. "I've noticed my 16-year-old Jonathan complains a lot less since he spent a few weeks in Haiti on a service project last year," observes Roger, an accountant in the Northeast. "He'll even eat vegetables more often now."

One adventure-learning program, called Ropes Adventure, works with adolescents detained for minor felonies and misdemeanors. The staff guides participants through a series of games, low-rope initiatives, and high-rope challenge activities. By evoking and then taming fear, they learn the power of personal accomplishment, trust and cooperation. Reviewing the dynamics of the ropes program, Lori Holyfield affirms that to engage in the building of character via adventure is to take an emotional journey inward, to face difficult feelings and learn how to express them in an appropriate way. With the hunger for excitement guided constructively, individuals become less inclined to act upon destructive impulses.[32]

Experiences of uncertainty and deprivation come in many forms, and not all of them require going out of doors. Commitment to the care of fish in hallway aquariums posed quite a challenge to elementary school children in Ivanova, Russia in the winter of 1999. The principal had agreed to allow the aquariums as long as students were completely responsible for feeding and caring for them. In the middle of winter, the temperatures in the hallways dropped because of a lack of fuel. Schools in town were closed, but the students took turns twice a day to pour warm water in the tanks so that the fish would survive.

In schools with a commitment to character education, teachers utilize a wide range of methods to support students' achievement of moral maturity. The school's commitment to the students' character development is evident in classrooms where moral standards are inculcated throughout the curriculum, where discipline is used to promote self-discipline and responsibility, and where students learn the skills of moral reasoning and reflection, problem solving and self-authorship. Thus, they become confident citizens with a core moral identity. However, character development is not only a personal journey; it takes place in community. The school's commitment to individual moral

maturity is usefully complemented by attention to the social world of the classroom, where character education is fostered by creating a "caring community." Such relationship issues are also vital to healthy character development, as they concern the second life goal.

12

Creating a Caring Community

CHARACTER GROWTH AND MORAL VITALITY ARE FOSTERED AS MUCH from interpersonal interactions as from individual efforts. Indeed, the fundamental energy for character development comes from the context of social relationships. Heart expands and grows with feelings of satisfaction and self-confidence through fulfilling ethical obligations, norms and duties to others. Learning how to successfully interact with others is a constant but essential challenge. A deficit in these skills leaves children at a distinct disadvantage.[1] Research suggests that social and emotional learning is one of the missing pieces of educational reform.[2]

The second life goal—loving relationships and family—highlights the relational nature of character development. Learning to relate well, as a younger to an elder and as peers, is the foundation for success in marriage, adult friendships and professional settings. The primary training ground for the life skills of good relationships is the family. For this reason, many of the most promising character-education practices focus on creating a family-like atmosphere in school, thus reinforcing in a school setting the competencies that should naturally be fostered in a good home.

Methods for a Caring Community in the Classroom

- Teacher as moral exemplar
- Establishing caring rapport
- Developing teacher competencies as moral educators
- Building a sense of belonging
- Sharing student biographies
- Cohort groups among students
- Intervention in peer harassment
- Buddy activities
- Attention to manners
- Sports teach teamwork, leadership and fairness
- Cooperative learning
- Class and group meetings

Teachers as Moral Examples and Mentors

A survey of teachers on the subject of being an agent for the moral development of children led to this response by a teacher who understood that her main responsibility was to model it in herself:

> You should live a life the students can learn from.... For example, if you're going to advocate temperance to the student, then you've got to practice it yourself. You can't live for parties and drinking. In that case you'd just undermine the bulk of what you are standing there teaching. Children can learn a lot indirectly by observing the life you lead as a teacher.[3]

Numerous studies point to the power of teacher modeling in influencing children's social-moral learning.[4] Much of human behavior is acquired through observation and imitation rather than through direct instruction. When the teacher fulfills his role as the center of ethical concern for students, this sets the moral foundation for the entire educational experience. His moral position becomes comparable to a parent in the home, with similar authority and responsibility. To be that parent-like figure, moral example and mentor is no small responsibility.

A teacher's character seldom escapes students' notice. Students in an accelerated math course in a Cook County, Illinois, high school were horrified to find their brilliant teacher pulling the wings off flies at his desk during break time. Janet, a student sensitive to the plight of animals, remarked that she never attended math class after that without a feeling of horror toward the man who entertained himself so cruelly: "It made you wonder what he'd do to you if he got you alone and powerless. It definitely eroded trust. No wonder I hated math."

So critical is the moral example of faculty and others at school that some school administrators spend the first several years of the character-education initiative focusing on just one goal: enlisting the agreement of the teachers and all adults in the school to be proper role models of care, respect and self-discipline. Moreover, a teacher's behavior and attitude set the classroom atmosphere, another factor influencing students' moral growth.[5]

Establishing Caring Rapport

The parent-like role of teachers begins with the caring, investment and moral guidance they offer students. Though no teachers are free of character defects, when students feel their earnest commitment to personal integrity and moral growth, the learning atmosphere of the classroom is enriched. On one hand, a teacher need not be afraid to assert his or her legitimate moral authority and declare what is acceptable and unacceptable in the classroom environment. Strong guidance and coaching in proper attitudes and behavior demonstrate the more assertive side of love. On the other hand, a caring heart toward the students, more than other aspects of good character, is a mark of genuine maturity and depth. The heart of a teacher who invests continually in students' well-being is remembered over a lifetime.

Students need individual attention, and the teacher who demonstrates personal caring can make a lasting impact on a child. Hal Urban demonstrates moral mentorship by coming in to class fifteen minutes early and waiting at the door to personally shake each student's hand as he or she enters the classroom. Through this simple act, he welcomes his students as an uncle might welcome his nephews and nieces. He demonstrates his respect for them as whole persons, letting them feel valued. Urban finds that this kind of personalized affirmation by a teacher transforms the classroom. On a final exam, when he asks students what they think they'll remember about the course ten years from now, many write they will remember the way he started each class.[6]

Teacher Competencies as a Moral Educator

Besides establishing a warm and caring rapport with students, teachers also require training to be able to integrate character content into their subject areas. Without skill and practice at developing imaginative lessons, a teacher's effectiveness as a moral mentor may remain underdeveloped.[7] Teachers engaged in moral education vary widely in their practices and understanding of the activity.[8] Many studies highlight the need for teachers to learn how to craft activities that help students internalize the moral dialogue of the classroom. Gordon Vessels found that even teachers with enthusiastic attitudes require support, extensive feedback, visits to model classrooms and training in classroom management techniques in order to create a warm and caring classroom atmosphere.[9]

Teachers who view themselves as moral educators naturally want to share their inner richness and reach out to students in a warm and helpful manner.[10] Experienced teachers give priority to building an ethos supportive of a caring and moral classroom. Some attitudes, practices and objectives germane to building this ethos include:

- Teach an ethic of interdependence;
- Foster empathy;
- Encourage the class to own each class member's problems;
- Help students to know one another well;
- Engage students in the process of making others feel important;

- Help students express appreciation to each other;
- Actively discourage selfishness and cruelty through swift intervention;
- View discipline problems as character-development opportunities;
- Allow students to participate in decision-making.

It comes as no surprise that most of these practices foster caring relationships within the classroom. A relationship focus affords many teaching opportunities for building character.

A Caring Community

The Child Development Project considers that learning takes place most effectively in a school setting of a caring community.[11] A caring community in the school that begins with faculty and staff development bears fruit by helping students know each other, care about each other, and feel a sense of belonging and responsibility towards each other. Where positive school spirit is lacking, students can be quite cruel to each other, even when they esteem the teacher. Such a climate is not only antithetical to character development, it also has a negative effect on academic performance, since students are inhibited by fear of ridicule and abuse by their peers. An atmosphere of rapport and positive regard among classmates, on the other hand, is naturally conducive to best efforts and helps prevent many behavior problems.

Building a Sense of Belonging

St. Rita's Catholic Elementary School in Dayton, Ohio, groups students in "family teams" of nine, consisting of one member from each grade, K to 8. A seventh and eighth grade boy and girl serve as the parent figures and are called the group's "mom" and "dad" by younger members. The older members look out for younger students and help them solve problems. At the start of the school year, these groups spend much of the first three days together in games and other activities that build emotional bonds. During the rest of the year, these family groups come together for regular events such as assemblies. Principal Maryann Eismann remarks, "There is no craziness in our school, just a peaceful, loving atmosphere. We think that much of this is due to our family

groupings."[12] This is an illustration of one imaginative way that schools of character build a caring community that can foster social intelligence and relational skills.

At East Side High in Paterson, New Jersey, Principal Joe Brown required that students be able to sing the school song upon request. Most schools have such a song, but few students know it, or else they dissolve into fits of derision when singing or listening to the song. East Side students thought the school song was so hopelessly out-dated that they re-vamped it into a more modern, upbeat and catchy version. The new school song provided yet another way for students to feel good about themselves and their school as a caring, spirited community.

Fostering Caring among Peers

Regularly changing seat neighbors, pairing different students up for projects, and creating opportunities for students to talk about themselves assists students in getting to know and be concerned about each other. Some teachers have students interview each other for biographical information. This can consist of asking the derivation of their name, their dreams, their heroes or heroines, etc.[13]

Hal Urban asks his students through partner interviews to explore questions such as: "What's something good that has happened to you recently?" "Is there someone in the class right now you could say something positive about?" "What is something you are thankful for?"[14] Debbie Wilcox fosters respect and kindness among her fifth grade students in Johnson City, New York, by gathering them in a circle three times a week and inviting them to express something appreciative about what a classmate did.[15] Efforts like these encourage a positive peer culture, which has a powerful influence on student conduct, as well as promoting character competency in relationship building.

Fostering a moral community means intervening when students harass each other. It is promoted by showing tolerance of and fostering empathy for students who are different from each other. The teacher models this by discouraging disparaging discourse among students and valuing each student's unique contribution to the classroom and school community.[16]

Buddy Activities

A buddies program is an intentional community-building activity at school where older children are paired with younger children. In these teacher-organized buddy activities, children are given real opportunities to practice mentoring others. Older children can read to younger ones and tutor them in various class subjects. These activities give older children a sense of responsibility and foster friendships across grades. They realize they are setting an example, so they are more mindful of their behavior. By helping their younger peers in learning, they benefit by extending their own learning as well. Younger students no longer feel intimidated by their older peers but look to them as friends.

Students make connections on the playground, in the hallways, lunchroom and on the bus. These unsupervised areas are the places where the worst behavior is often exhibited, and transforming them is one objective of the buddy program. Rebecca Harmon, the principal of Frayser Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, comments on its results: "Bus referrals have decreased. Older students now know the younger students and realize that they are the models for them. They see one another in a different perspective as a result of being buddies."[17]

Relationships are built not only with students but also between buddy teachers, who collaborate on teaching and discipline. As a result, schools become more than a collection of separate classrooms. They become caring communities where both faculty and students feel a sense of belonging. The school becomes a structured environment where students feel safe and empowered to develop caring relationships, thus furthering their aspiration toward the second basic life goal.

Etiquette and Manners

Social skills training includes the art of good manners. A centerpiece of the character-building program at the Fairfield Country Day School in Fairfield, Connecticut, is the daily formal lunch that teachers and students share. Seated in groups with one teacher per table, students dine with linen napkins and water glasses. A "manners coach" instructs and reminds diners on how to place napkins on laps, conversational tone, and the proper way to request food. Beginning in the fourth grade, students may become "lunchroom servers" and bring food to the table. This is a coveted position, eclipsed only by the third grade position of "table cleaners" who get to sponge clean each table after

the meal is finished. Headmaster Robert Vitalo remarks that the lunch-room ritual provides a central place for the transmission of the school's norms: "We are modeling old fashioned manners."

The Power of Sports

The value of physical education and sports in fostering relation-ship-building competencies deserves special consideration. Sports are a time-honored way to socialize young people in culturally specific ways of living with others. Team sports, games and physical challenges are ready metaphors for the challenges that lie ahead in adult life. Further, because they are fun, sports are a uniquely engaging vehicle for character growth. Sports provide opportunities to explore what it feels like to win magnanimously or arrogantly, to lose gracefully or resent-fully, to cheat and to be cheated, to struggle or to give up, to cooperate or not cooperate, to have a respectful or bossy leader, to be a good or bad teammate, etc. These are enriching contexts for self-reflection and moral development that cannot be as readily learned in the classroom.

Lessons of Leadership, Authority and Teamwork

Sports encourage virtues such as self-discipline, but more impor-tantly, they train in cooperation and teamwork. They implicitly and explicitly teach about authority. Team sports give participants experi-ences of leading and following, and they learn the reciprocal nature of these roles. A student thrust into the role of captain learns leadership skills—how to motivate others. Other players on the team learn that they need to support each other even if they do not like each other. How individual team members work together largely determines their success. Coach Vince Lombardi remarked, "Individual commitment to a group effort—that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work."

Sports also demonstrate the relativity of winning and losing. When boys and girls find themselves on top one day and on the bottom the next, they learn humility and compassion. Indeed, they discover that treating the defeated well pays off when the tables turn and they are in the winners' position on another occasion.

Citizenship Training

Child development theorist Jean Piaget asserted that games teach children the necessity and value of conducting themselves according to rules. Thus, they teach how to function in a rule-governed environment such as a market economy. Piaget observed that the players learn that rules should be enforced impartially to protect all participants and ensure that "victory be honorable."[18] A team or player who cheats or is unnecessarily aggressive may win more often to start with, but will end up with a bad reputation and not be regarded as the true winner.[19] Students have the opportunity to observe how maintaining personal integrity is ultimately more important than outcome.

In School District 44 in Lombard, Illinois, the Friday night football game becomes an occasion for reminders about character for both players and spectators. The high school band plays Aretha Franklin's song, "Respect." Student speakers reflect on sportsmanship during half time. The audience is encouraged to be courteous in their role as fans.[20] A character-minded parent, teacher or coach utilizes the lessons of the gymnasium and athletic field to socialize good character, multiplying the effectiveness of classroom efforts.

Class Meetings

Class meetings build a moral community by giving students the experience of talking and listening to each other respectfully in a group. In this way it teaches how to participate in a democratic process. The teacher may simply facilitate the discussion, but more often she takes a parental role, setting the moral tone and mediating disputes. Just as the parent's valuing of each child models how siblings should respect each other, so the teacher's example in the class meeting demonstrates what valuing each member in a group looks like.

A class meeting can be a few minutes or a half-hour long, conducted daily or periodically. The teacher, or a student under the teacher's direction, leads the meeting. The topic can range from the academic—planning a project, discussing values, hearing and discussing a student presentation, reflecting on a lesson—to the interpersonal—affirming each other, sharing feelings, problem-solving, resolving a conflict, making rules, or improving class procedures. At the initial meeting on the first day of school, the teacher explains the purpose and rules of such

meetings. Students consider individual and class goals for learning, conditions supportive of such learning, and suggest ways to create a good learning environment in their classroom.[21]

Shoreham-Wading River Middle School in Shoreham, New York has built an advisory system of student teams that emphasizes support and advocacy for each adolescent. This is designed to give teachers a context in which they can effectively guide the seven to twelve students that make up each team, and students are provided with a supportive peer group. The group meets for twelve minutes each morning and for fifteen minutes during lunch. They discuss school concerns; share what has been happening to individuals within the group, solve problems and discuss important issues. The teacher advisors keep parents informed on both good and bad news regarding their children. Following implementation of this system, the school has found that discipline problems declined, staff moral improved, and parental involvement increased.

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a method that structures learning around collaborative tasks. Extensive research has found that in addition to increased academic learning, students engaged in cooperative learning activities develop more positive social attitudes and behavior.[22] This form of learning fosters interdependence, trust, respect, tolerance of diversity, and it reduces interpersonal conflict. It tends to break down cliques and encourage more interactions between competent and less competent students.[23] In addition, working together to achieve a common goal teaches attentive listening, responsibility to a team, taking the viewpoint of others, communicating effectively and solving conflicts.[24] These are invaluable competencies for building and sustaining good relationships throughout life.

In schools that have adopted the Child Development Project, many of the literature units make extensive use of a format called "think-pair-share." After reading or listening to a story, students work in pairs to discuss plot, themes, characters and vocabulary, which are shared with the whole class.[25] Small cooperative teams can research a big topic such as a period of history by delegating, for example, areas like politics, culture and economics to different team members. These "specialists" do the research and report to fellow members. Everyone must do his or her

part or no one will be able to complete the assignment as a whole. This strategy encourages low achievers to make more effort. Having a student specialize and be needed by the partner or team builds self-confidence and demonstrates how each person has something essential to offer.

A teacher provides guidelines and structure to facilitate effective cooperative learning.[26] She emphasizes that cooperation itself is an important classroom goal. She helps students understand how rules are for the sake of facilitating cooperation, and may possibly assign roles to group members. She instructs in the specific skills needed to cooperate, such as listening, taking careful notes, and communicating regularly. She provides an opportunity for students to reflect and discuss how well their groups are functioning and how they can improve their working relationships in the group.[27]

These are some of the methods by which schools pursue the character education mission by building a caring community. A school that functions as a caring community fosters young people's moral development in the second life goal of loving relationships and family. The effective teacher recognizes his quasi-parental role towards his students, and hence seeks to act as a moral exemplar and mentor. His emotional and social investment fosters a caring environment and feeling of family in the classroom. Good peer relationships are encouraged and guided through coaching in social skills and strategies that build a sense of interdependence and shared responsibility, as well as teamwork, moral community, and cooperative learning. These elements provide a wholesome relational ecosystem out of which altruistic attitudes and good character may more readily emerge.

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Learning to Serve

TWELVE-YEAR-OLD CRAIG KIELBURGER OF TORONTO, CANADA, felt horrified after reading about a boy who was killed after speaking out against child labor in Pakistan's carpet weaving industry. He formed an organization called Free the Children, dedicated to ending child exploitation throughout the world. Within two years, Free the Children not only created an education and rehabilitation center for Pakistani youngsters to keep them out of the child labor system, it stirred an international ban on products produced with child labor. "I'd like to make a difference here," says Craig, "and I see that what's needed to solve this problem is for everyone to get involved and relay the message that we want this to change."[1]

The task of educating youth to follow Craig's example and make a positive difference in the world involves several components, including inculcating high work standards, service-learning projects, and programs to educate about consumer and environmental issues. They further the innate aspiration to realize the third basic life goal—making a contribution to society.

Learning to Make a Contribution

- Academic excellence
- Service learning in the community
- Helping the elderly
- Classroom chores and school service
- Environmental education
- Gardening
- Animal care
- Conscientious consumption
- Media literacy
- Discussing and practicing charitable giving

Academic Excellence

Most schools set high academic expectations. High standards impart the virtues of self-discipline, diligence and perseverance, since good work requires small sacrifices on a daily basis. Further, insisting on academic excellence signals adult trust in the ability of each child and teenager, which in itself boosts a sense of pride and self-worth. High work standards thus offer intrinsic as well as extrinsic rewards. The ultimate goal is to help students adopt ambitious standards for themselves in order to gain a sense of pride in their craft that will become a foundation for success in the world of work.

Engaging students' interest in their studies and helping them want to invest in learning is a time-honored method of promoting academic excellence. Students are further motivated to strive for high standards when they gain real expertise in a particular area. When a child

receives recognition for her depth of understanding about the pyramids of Egypt, for example, she will tend to incorporate competence into her self-image and aim for expertise in other areas as well.

Julie, a West Coast ninth grader, maintained a C average in science. Despite her loathing of the subject, she determined to bring her grade up and pushed herself to study long hours. Eventually she not only mastered the material—achieving As—but became genuinely interested in it as well. Now a promising pre-med student, she's learned that hard work and diligence will bring her mastery of any subject. "I did it then—I can do it now" is part of her self-talk.

Promoting good study habits, especially as regards homework, also builds character competencies for the life goal of contributing to society. When managed properly by teachers and parents, homework fosters a spectrum of values collectively known as the work ethic. These include responsibility, autonomy, perseverance, time management, initiative, self-reliance and resourcefulness. "Homework can and should be a character-building experience," says John Rosemond, a teacher at the Camden Middle School.[2]

Service Learning

Structured experiences of service learning provide students with rewarding experiences of making a contribution that can inspire a life-long orientation toward helping others. There are numerous opportunities for young people to invest themselves in service. Ruth Charney voices the deliberateness of doing this: "We need to teach children to give care as well as to receive care. We must help them learn to contribute, to want to contribute."[3] "No one who desires to become good will become good unless he does good things," wrote Aristotle. Service learning activities such as working in soup kitchens, roadside cleanup or helping out in specialized institutions challenge students to develop their awareness of the needs of others, the desire to help others, and the skills and habits of helping. It expands their level of moral knowing, moral feeling and moral action and connection to the community.[4]

More and more schools are requiring community service as part of their character education program. Research in the U.S. shows about 60 percent of adolescents twelve to seventeen years of age volunteer at least three hours weekly in service. The helping response is especially

strong when they are directly asked to be of assistance.[5] Many high schools have mandatory service hours that students are required to complete in order to graduate. Typical is the Camden Middle School, where all eighth graders are required to perform a minimum of three hours of community service during the school year as part of their social studies program. Students can receive credit for up to 15 hours. The service must be unpaid, be outside of regular school hours, help others outside of the student's immediate family, and be documented in writing by an adult.

Igniting intrinsic motivation within students can help overcome the common complaint that they are being asked to do service involuntarily. The Giraffe Heroes Program recommends asking students to choose a concern that they share and to develop a response to that concern.[6]

Chuck Wall, who teaches human relations in Bakersfield College, California, was listening to the radio news when he heard the newscaster say, "We have another act of senseless violence to report." When he walked into his class of eighteen students, he gave them an assignment to commit "one random act of senseless kindness" during the next week. At the class's next meeting, all had stories to report. Shane bought blankets from the Salvation Army and distributed them to a group of homeless people. Lisa rescued a ragged stray collie, bathed and fed it, then put up posters that reunited the dog with its owner. The assignment had such impact that the students were inspired to continue their campaign for kindness on their own. They had bumper stickers printed up; the Kern County sheriff ordered 150 for his patrol cars.

School Service

The school itself is a natural locus for diverse service activities. A simple one is peer tutoring, where adept students coach classmates having a difficult time with a subject. Peers may also befriend and help disabled students. In an intriguing twist, a Canadian project has 9 to 12-year-old learning-disabled students reading to kindergartners, thus boosting the older students' academic performance.[7]

Assigning class chores encourages service in the classroom, fostering citizenship from the early grades. At a kindergarten class at Sacred Heart School in Lyndhurst, New Jersey, one child is designated the "table manager" who makes sure the baskets of scissors, glue and construction paper are filled. Another child is the "folder person" who

puts notices from the school into the children's take-home folders. Melissa, 6, boasts of her assignment to make sure all the closet doors are closed after use.

Litter Critters is a program suggested by the Child Development Project in which a student club or an entire grade helps regularly to clean the school inside and out, and sometimes helps with a clean-up project in the community.[8] Schools in Asia typically apportion chores through a team system. In Beijing's Yu Ying Middle School, each class in divided into six groups, which take turns each day to stay late and clean the classroom. An entire class from each grade takes responsibility to clean the school each week. These students do not view it simply as an obligation; they take pride in helping provide a clean and safe environment.

Schools have had great success conducting food or clothing drives for disadvantaged people in the surrounding communities. The Mound Fort Middle School involves the entire school in making quilts for the needy. After school, students can be found sewing and tying quilts. This one project has unified the once-violent urban school and transformed its atmosphere dramatically. "Often students come to school with a 'What's in it for me?' attitude," says the Mound Fort principal, Tim Smith. However, in service they come to "discover a joy they never knew before." They feel needed and more connected to their community.[9]

Serving the Elderly

Activities involving the elderly link students to the community and its living history, and they provide particularly enriching experiences of service. Newsome Park Elementary encourages cooperation of children and seniors through a program called "Joining Old and Young." Kindergarten and first grade students visit a plant nursery and work together with seniors to build a greenhouse when studying living things. When technology is the focus, the elderly share about past days without modern conveniences while their young partners take them to the school's computer room. Despite their knowledge of computers and the Internet, the kids soon realize that their elderly friends possess the more important and profound insights about life. Also, children in the fourth and fifth grades serve elderly patients at a local veterans hospital, reading to them, assisting them, and becoming their friends.[10]

Reflection and Integration

For service learning to be effective, it should include time to reflect upon and learn from the experience, later that day or the next. This is what distinguishes service learning from volunteerism and traditional service projects. This moral reflection is a conscious and intentional activity of thinking about and connecting the service activity to character lessons and integrating the experience into one's own value system.

Adolescents thrive on discussion and reflection with peers in order to understand the meaning of moral commitment and action. This is an opportunity to teach the value of making an investment in society. In Atlanta, Georgia, students manage a food closet for local residents. Through peer dialogue and essay reflection, they consider how to solve the issues of homelessness and poverty. Awareness of the complexity of social issues grows and students realize that there are no simple answers to society's problems. More importantly, many students begin to recognize the power of compassion in action for healing wounds and imparting a sense of value and dignity.[11]

Reflection is conducted in a variety of ways. Journal writing is a common practice, as is voluntary sharing of thoughts in class. By hearing about the experiences of others, students amplify and deepen their own interpretation of the activity's meaning. Other forms of reflection include writing poetry and stories and performances of music and drama.

Research that compared the strengths and weaknesses of ten different service learning projects at six high schools in one urban school district concluded that students had greater benefit in programs that rated highly on four criteria: duration, location, amount of personal contact with beneficiaries, and focus of the project.[12] To have a meaningful influence on students, service-learning projects strive for a delicate balance between the service and learning components. Projects with a clear emphasis on service fare better than those with service as an adjunct feature. The learning component is optimized when carefully incorporated into the service component.

Rewards of Service Learning

Service learning offers an abundance of rewards. It has been shown to boost interpersonal and human relations skills and to enhance academic learning.[13] A teacher from the environmental service project

of the East Peoria, Illinois, school district exclaimed, "Service learning works! The students were working cooperatively, developing their academic skills, and learning that they are an important resource to the community. They felt a sense of ownership of their community's resources and a sense of stewardship."[14] Kathy Winings of the International Relief Friendship Foundation explains, "Those who become involved in service learning are able to witness up close that the real truth of our world is found in the quality of our human relations and in the concept of family. A teenager helping in a homeless shelter in lower Manhattan as part of the Youth Service Opportunity Project comes to see a human face on what previously may have been an abstract concept—homelessness."[15] One student who visited handicapped children at a local hospital in a class project of the Shoreham-Wading Middle School commented on the transforming power of these face-to-face relationships: "When I used to see retarded kids, I was afraid of them. Now the retarded have become people to me, with needs and wants."[16]

Service learning turns the ethic of making a contribution into a compelling human experience. When students are able to witness the beneficial impact of their actions on others, their sense of meaning and pride is enriched. This becomes the most potent incentive to want to repeat that experience and reach out to help again.

Environmental Education

Caring for the environment is not only an indispensable part of character education, it is a valuable vehicle for it. In East Peoria, Illinois, students centered their service learning on the local river and reservoir. In an application of cooperative learning, one class took responsibility to evaluate the drinking water on a daily basis. Another measured the rate of evaporation and replacement, and yet another class studied the immediate area for environmental factors that would affect the quality of the water supply. The issues of water pollution, usage and conservation were raised. Some students spoke in school convocations to help the other students become more aware of water issues. Others mounted a public water conservation and proper usage campaign to heighten the community's awareness of the issues. As a result, the students gained a deeper appreciation of the community's water supply and how many living things rely upon it. They also realized how

much water they waste on a daily basis and what actions they could take to conserve water.[17]

A community garden is a highly visible and satisfying school project.[18] Few things spark a greater sense of wonder and connection to the earth than a simple experience of planting, cultivating and finally enjoying fresh tomatoes right out of the garden. Gardening teaches a plethora of lessons, from natural science to perseverance and patience. Abandoned lots or school property can be utilized. At the Atlantis Elementary School, students fashioned a butterfly garden and tend an ongoing compost pile for their "Kinder Garden."[19] Bruce Laberee, the art teacher, introduced the techniques of pruning and training juniper bonsai trees. These activities offered a new way to view trees—as a work to be sculpted with meditative clarity and beauty.

Young people's natural affinity for animals can be utilized to teach character lessons in compassion and responsibility. At the East Harlem Maritime School, teacher Joe Binenbaum operates a small zoo of snakes, birds, lizards and small mammals adopted from pet owners and the local ASPCA. The ninth-grade students care for them, even raising money for their feed by holding bake sales and other fundraising events. They visit their pets daily even when school is out. Some students who had previously been truant returned to school to work with the animals.[20]

Concern for animals led a group of second graders in Vidya Elementary School in Petalume, California, to environmental action. Moved by the plight of endangered elephants, these youngsters organized the Friends of Wild Life Club to make efforts on the elephants' behalf, raising money for research and lobbying for their protection. The notable elephant researcher, Oria Douglas-Hamilton, testified that while living in Africa, her greatest morale boost to fight for the international ivory ban came from this group of American schoolchildren.[21]

Environmentalism and Culture

Every community has effective environmental teachers that may go unnoticed: gardeners, carpenters, canoeists, cycling instructors and others who show youngsters different aspects of how a culture and its people live in an ecologically sustainable manner. Valuable too are elders who carry the wisdom of forbearers who lived closer to the natural rhythms of the land. Farmers, fishermen and naturalists have stories

and insights to share that they gained by observation and intuition through living intimately and respectfully with nature.[22] The art of indigenous people serves in a similar way.

Learning to respect and care for their natural environment affords many benefits for developing good character. In *Connect*, a Rhode Island newsletter for K through 8 teachers, educator Loraine Keeney reports these efforts "are proving that environment projects not only lead to solid scientific learning but also dispel attitudes of hopelessness and despair about the environment, develop citizenship skills, and instill self-esteem."[23] In turn, people who have learned to value themselves and other people through an edifying human environment are "more likely to pick up litter, avoid stepping on plants or destroying animals' homes, conserve energy, and generally care for the earth and its creatures."[24]

Conscientious Consumption and Charitable Giving

Material comforts and financial security are prized, yet affluence presents its own challenges, some of them moral. Excessive materialism often blinds people to life's priorities, while wealth wisely used brings personal rewards and benefits society.

"Conscientious consumerism" is the term used by Albert Conquest in his eighth grade class in Albion Elementary, Albion, Connecticut, to describe enjoyment of available material comforts with a mind towards conserving the earth's resources. It links the inculcation of ecological awareness and the shunning of waste to an ethic of mindful and conscientious consumption.

Training in media literacy means teaching youth to be perceptive consumers and acquire a critical stance on commercially driven media and advertising. They learn to question whether they really need a certain product and whether it will deliver on its claims and promises. This is an important aspect of moral citizenship in an information-driven society.

America's tradition of charitable giving exemplifies another time-honored way to make a social contribution. An activity in which students decide where to donate accumulated money integrates lesson objectives in civic, economic and social areas. Students might do research projects on great philanthropists or how foundations decide on which projects

to support. At the Rawlings School, three students took on the task of deciding where to donate the $100 they raised through two car washes. Debating the merits of various charities, they finally decided on an overseas program for needy children. "They discussed whether it was better to give locally or internationally, to an organization or a family. Next year it will be even more interesting!" said Clarissa Evans, the fifth grade teacher.

Intentional character education provides a variety of opportunities for students to experience the joy and energy stemming from being active social agents. "Nothing bigger can come from a human being than to love a great cause more than love itself and to have the privilege of working for it," wrote the British-born physician and reformer, Anna Howard Shaw. From the virtues engendered by good study habits to service learning and environmental education, character-building schools equip youth with the competencies to become productive citizens who contribute to their community.