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Educating for Character: The School's Highest Calling

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In the early 1980s Winkelman Elementary School, located on Chicago's north shore, found itself unhappy with student attitudes and behavior. Winkelman serves a diverse social and economic community; some children are from welfare families, while others come to school in limos. Fights and put-downs among children were common. Students would frequently "smart-off" ("I don't have to listen to you!") to teachers and other adults.

Winkelman decided that to address this problem effectively, it needed a school wide approach. It launched a project called Let's Be Courteous, Let's Be Caring that emphasized the virtues of courtesy and caring at every opportunity.

When you walk into Winkelman Elementary School, the first thing you see in the lobby is a giant display defining courtesy and caring in terms of behaviors that can be seen in the life of the school. Courtesy is defined as: (1) Saying please, thank you, you're welcome, and excuse me; (2) Being a good listener; (3) Waiting your turn; (4) Acting politely everywhere; and (5) Discussing problems. "Caring" is defined as: (1) Sharing; (2) Respecting others' feelings; (3) Following rules; (4) Working cooperatively; and (5) Being a good friend.

When Winkelman teachers set up classroom rules, they asked students, "What rules do we need that will help us show courtesy and caring toward each other?" When a student broke a rule, the teacher took that child aside and asked, "Did that behavior show courtesy?" or "Did

it show caring?" In this way, students learned to use these standards to assess their own behavior.

When teachers held parent conferences, they said to parents, "We're stressing courtesy and caring at school this year, but we need your help at home." At weekly school assemblies, students performed skits on courtesy or caring or invited speakers in to talk on these themes.

Finally, all students became involved in community service. They worked with the physically handicapped, the elderly, and the less fortunate, so that they learned to care by giving care.

The moral environment at Winkelman steadily improved. When I visited the school, parents said fights had become very rare. Children said that if you forgot your lunch, you could always count on somebody to give you some of theirs. A veteran teacher who had taught in several other Chicago schools said that Winkelman students showed an unusually high level of respect for adults and each other. Three years after beginning its character education project, Winkelman Elementary School was recognized in a Chicago area competition for excellence in both academic excellence and character education.

The Nature of Character Education

Character education is arguably the fastest growing educational movement in the nation today. What is it? Character education, as demonstrated by the Winkelman story, is the deliberate effort to teach virtue. It's not letting kids decide for themselves what's right and wrong; rather the school stands for virtues and promotes them explicitly at every turn. It's not just talk; thinking and discussing are important, but the bottom line is behavior. Actions, as the psychiatrist Robert Coles has observed, are the ultimate measure of our character.

Character education is not a separate course, though that can be part of it. Rather it's a whole school effort to create a community of virtue, where behaviors such as respect, honesty, diligence, and kindness are modeled, taught, expected, celebrated, and continuously practiced in everyday interactions. Practice is key. That's because a guiding principle is the idea, going back to Aristotle, that virtues are not mere thoughts; they are habits we develop by performing virtuous acts. "Character development," as psychologist Paul Vitz aptly puts it, "is a performing art." When the young are repeatedly led to perform virtuous actions, they will come to think of themselves as good people. This principle was recently demonstrated in a character education curriculum developed by professor Vitz that had 7th and 8th grade students watch and discuss 30~minute versions of feature films (such as "It's A Wonderful Life," "The Miracle Worker," and "To Sir With Love") that depicted altruism. The students' homework was to plan and carry out an altruistic act each day. Students frequently carried out such acts in their families—for example, helping a parent without being asked. After the course, students who had had this curriculum showed a significant increase in altruistic attitudes and spontaneous acts of altruism. Moreover, students' views of themselves were changed. Said one 8th grade boy: "I know I'm a good person, because I do good things."

In its underlying philosophy, character education rejects moral relativism. It reasserts the idea of objective moral truth-the notion that some things are truly right and others truly wrong. Objective truth, as Boston College philosopher Peter Kreeft points out, is truth that is independent of the knower. That Lincoln was president during the Civil War is objectively true, even if someone doesn't know it. That adultery is wrong, torture wrong, date rape wrong, cheating wrong, and the taking of innocent life wrong are objective moral truths-even if many people don't realize it. Objective moral truths have a claim on our conscience and behavior. The modern subjectivist notion is that we should each follow our own conscience, but that is a dangerous half-truth. From the standpoint of objective morality, there is a prior obligation: We must *first form* our conscience correctly, in accord with what is objectively true and right. An important contribution of renewed character education is that it has given teachers permission to speak, as they once did, the language of objective morality-to talk to students plainly about right and wrong.

The Content of Character

Good character is the constellation of virtues possessed by a person. Virtues are objectively good human qualities. They include the ancient Greek virtues of prudence (which enables us to judge what we ought to do), justice (which enables us to give other persons their due), fortitude (which enables us to do what is right in the face of difficulties), and temperance (which enables us to control our desires and to avoid abuse of even legitimate pleasures). Virtues are good for the individual because they help a person lead a fulfilling life. They are good for the whole human community because they enable us to live together harmoniously and productively.

Virtues are different from "values." Values are whatever you or I subjectively consider to be important. You may value being a good person; I may value getting ahead at any price. Everyone has values, but not everyone has virtues. As the columnist George Will quipped, Hitler had values, but he didn't have virtues. Moreover, virtues, unlike "values," don't change. Justice, honesty, and patience always have been and always will be virtues. Virtues transcend time and culture.

Every virtue, like character as a whole, has three parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behavior. To possess the virtue of justice, for example, I must first understand what justice is and what justice requires of me in human relations (moral knowing). I must also care about justice-be emotionally committed to it, have the capacity for appropriate guilt when I behave unjustly, and be capable of moral indignation when I see others suffer unjustly (moral feeling). Finally, I must practice justice- acting fairly in my personal relations and carrying out my obligations as a citizen to help build a just society (moral behavior). Thus teachers, in order to develop virtuous character in their students, must help them know what the virtues are, appreciate their importance and want to possess them, and practice them in their day-to-day conduct.

Within the past five years character education has mushroomed into a national movement. The 1990s have seen a spate of books on the subject, with titles like *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong*, *The Book of Virtues*, and *The Call to Character*; the emergence of three national organizations-the Character Education Partnership, the Character

Counts Coalition, and the Communitarian Network dedicated to putting character development at the top of the nation's educational agenda; U .S. Department of Education funding of character education projects; three White House Conferences on Character- Building for a Democratic and Civil Society, with a fourth, jointly sponsored by Congress, in the planning; state mandates requiring that schools spend some time every day on character education; state conferences on character education, like the one sponsored last March by the Georgia Humanities Council; the creation of university-based centers and summer institutes in character education such as we offer at the State University of New York at Cortland; and grassroots initiatives by schools, many of which have developed home-grown, low-cost character education programs that are having a positive impact on school climate and student behavior.

The premise of the character education movement is straightforward. Irresponsible and destructive behaviors such as violence, dishonesty, drug abuse, sexual promiscuity, and a poor work ethic have a common core: the absence of good character. Character education, unlike piecemeal reforms, offers the hope of improvement in all these areas. But the school can't do this alone. The challenge that the character education movement sets before the nation is all-encompassing: for families, schools, faith communities, youth organizations, business, government, and the media-all those who touch the lives of the young- to come together in common cause to elevate the character of our children and, ultimately, one hopes, the character of our culture.

A Look Back

How and why did schools get away from character education? Down through history, in cultures around the world, education had always had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good. Energized by that belief, schools in the earliest days of our republic tackled character education head on. They did so through discipline, the teacher's good example, and the content of the curriculum. In the beginning, the Bible was the public school's sourcebook for both moral and religious instruction. Eventually, however, sectarian disputes arose over who's Bible to use and which doctrines to teach. In 1836 William McGuffey stepped onto the stage to offer his *McGuffey Readers* as a way to teach schoolchildren the natural virtues espoused by all faiths and by secular society.

McGuffey Readers gave pupils a daily diet of inspiring stories about honesty, hard work, thriftiness, patriotism, kindness, and courage. They read of how Susie Sunbeam helps a "poor and ragged little girl" by giving her one of her own dresses and a pair of shoes. They read of how Henry the bootblack returns a wealthy man's wallet, uses the reward of a dollar to start a shoe-shining business, and with the money he earns is able to support his sick mother and little sister. Tales like these may sound corny to a modern ear, but they captured the imagination of an earlier age. By 1919 the *McGuffey Reader* had the largest circulation of any book in the world next to the Bible. In the twentieth century the confident consensus supporting old-fashioned character education began to crumble. It did so under the hammer blows of several powerful forces.

The philosophy of logical positivism, arriving at American universities from Europe, asserted that moral statements (e.g., "Cruelty is bad," "Kindness is good"), unlike scientific assertions, could not be proven and therefore had no status as truth. As a result of positivism,

morality was subjectivized and relativized- made to seem purely a matter of subjective "value judgment," not a matter for public debate and certainly not for public transmission through the schools.

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

At the same time, the rapidly intensifying pluralism of American society raised the vexing question, "Whose values should we teach?" Finally, the increasing secularization of the public arena caused people to worry, "Won't moral education get you into religion and violate separation of church and state?"

When much of society came to think of morality as being entirely subjective and not something that we could ever agree on in a pluralistic and secular society, public schools retreated from their once central role as character educators. As one fifth-grade teacher put it, "Somewhere between Sputnik and computers, morality got lost."

The late 1960s and 1970s saw a return of values education but in new forms: values clarification and Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussions. In different ways, both of these new approaches expressed the individualist temper of the times. Values clarification said don't impose values; help students choose their values freely. Values clarification took the relativism loose in the land and brought it into the schools. By contrast, Kohlberg was not relativistic; he urged teachers to develop, through Socratic questioning, students' powers of moral reasoning to higher levels, so they can judge which values are better than others. But in both approaches, the teacher was cast as a facilitator, not a moral model and certainly not a directive moral guide. (Kohlberg's later work, less well known, shifted to developing "just communities" in schools and gave much more attention to the school's role as a moral socializer.)

The current character movement is a reaction against the non-directive and overly cognitive methods of recent decades. But it doesn't advocate simply dusting off the *McGuffey Readers* (though many schools are making good use of them). Even a quick perusal of today's character education literature reveals an effort to integrate modern techniques-such as cooperative learning, class meetings, conflict resolution, service learning, and moral reflection-into a "comprehensive approach" that blends the best of the old and new.

But the primary thrust of the new character education, its animating spirit, is to get schools and families back to the basics of old-fashioned character-building. It wants to help kids know the good, love the good, and do the good. Its goal is to educate young people who can judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and do what's right-even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within.

Why is character education making a comeback now? Poll after poll finds that a great majority of Americans believe that the United States is in moral and spiritual decline. Things

have gotten bad enough to jolt us out of our relativism. Here, for example, are ten troubling youth trends, documented by various studies and confirmed by everyday observation:

1. Rising youth violence {juvenile violent crime increased six fold from 1960 to 19921}
2. Increasing dishonesty {lying, cheating, and stealing}
3. Growing disrespect for parents, teachers, and other legitimate authority figures
4. Increasing peer cruelty
5. A rise in prejudice and hate crime
6. The deterioration of language
7. A decline in the work ethic
8. Declining personal responsibility and civic responsibility
9. A surge of self-destructive behaviors such as premature sexual activity { we have one of the highest teen pregnancy rates and the highest teen abortion rate in the developed world, according to a 1989 United Nations study) , alcohol and drug abuse, and youth suicide { which has tripled in the past three decades}
10. Growing ethical illiteracy, including ignorance of moral knowledge as basic as the Golden Rule and the tendency to engage in destructive behavior without thinking it wrong.

University of Alabama professor Kevin Walsh points out that our task as adults is to prepare the next generation to inherit society. Civilizations do not flourish forever; they rise and they fall. And they fall when the moral core deteriorates-when a society fails to transmit its moral ideals to the young.

As we stand at this cultural crossroads, what are the hopes held out by the character education movement? Here are four, set forth in the publication *Character Education in U .S. Schools: A New Consensus*, a 1996 release from the national Character Education Partnership. It states: "Effective K-12 character education: (1) helps make schools more civil and caring communities; (2) reduces negative student behavior such as violence, pregnancy, substance abuse, and disrespect for teachers, parents, and peers; (3) improves academic performance; and (4) prepares young people to be responsible citizens and productive members of society."

What is the evidence that character education can produce such outcomes? Most of the successes thus far, like the Winkelman school story, can be found at the elementary level. If you aren't already familiar with the work being done at West Point Elementary School in West Point, Georgia, I would encourage you to learn about it. Principal Bill Parsons, his staff, and parents have created a school wide character education program that focuses on a different character quality each week. Staff drew up a list of 30 qualities and then surveyed parents to ask what character qualities they deemed most important. West Point's list includes school pride, punctuality, courtesy, respect for others, patience, fairness, responsibility, cleanliness, citizenship, compassion, tolerance, honesty, perseverance, and diligence.

On Monday the character trait of the week is defined on the board and discussed. Children write the definition in their character journals. On day 2, each classroom considers questions such as, "How did your classmates and the school staff show this quality yesterday? How did members of your family show this quality yesterday? And how can you show this quality today at school and at home?" Students are thereby given responsibility for personal goal setting, which is just as essential in character development as it is in academics.

On day 3, West Point students read and discuss a paragraph about a real-life person who exemplifies the quality of the week. Parents and teachers have both helped to write these brief stories. West Point wisely draws many of its real-life character exemplars from its own school staff and community. For example, during week 2, when the focus is on punctuality, the example is Margie McCullough, the school cook. The story tells of how Mrs. McCullough has to be at school by 6:00 am in order to help prepare 200 breakfast trays for students. Students are asked, "Why is it important for Mrs. McCullough to be on time? What might happen if she were late to work?" And each week, a newsletter goes to West Point parents with suggestions for home activities that reinforce that week's character quality. West Point's daily character education program has reportedly raised test scores and improved school-wide discipline.

What about the difficult middle school years, when rapid developmental changes lead kids to be so hard on themselves and hard on each other? And what about kids whose vulnerability during these turbulent years is increased by stress, poverty, and other adversities at home? Will character education work in such cases?

Consider the story of Washington, D.C.'s Jefferson Junior High School. Fully 90% of Jefferson's students come from single-parent families, "When I arrived," says principal Vera White, "parents and the community felt they were losing the children- to the drugs, to the streets, to the gangs." Theft and fighting were common. Twelve to fifteen girls got pregnant each year.

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

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

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

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

Success stories like these are impressive, but are there controlled research studies to back them up? The Child Development Project (CDP), first piloted in San Ramon, California,

and then replicated around the country, offers what is perhaps the best research evidence that character education makes a difference. Its elementary-level character program has five interlocking components: (1) a reading and language arts curriculum that uses children's literature to reflect on qualities of good character; (2) cooperative learning, giving students regular practice in learning to work with others; (3) discipline that involves students actively in creating a classroom that respects others and supports learning; (4) school service programs, such as cross-age tutoring and "buddy classes" that enable older kids to help younger ones; and (5) home-based family activities that provide parents with ways to foster their children's character development.

In a longitudinal research evaluation, students in three CDP elementary schools, compared to students in matched control schools, were found to be more considerate and cooperative in their class~ rooms; more likely to feel accepted by their peers; more skilled at solving interpersonal problems; and more strongly committed to democratic beliefs. In a follow-up study in eighth grade, students who had had the CDP program showed stronger conflict resolution skills, had greater self-esteem, were involved in more extracurricular activities, and were less likely to use marijuana or alcohol.

Character Education in the High School

Finally, what about high schools? Will character education work at this level, when teachers often feel students have built up a wall of cynicism and are already into a lot of behaviors that are antithetical to good character?

By way of offering hope for high schools, let me share with you a conversation I had recently with a high school teacher named John Moss. John teaches 11th grade literature at Wasatch High School in Heber, Utah and serves on the character education leadership committee at his school. He says, "We started slowly, with just those faculty who wanted to participate. We didn't mandate it. Little by little, other faculty started to come to us. Our message to faculty is that character education will make your life better. We believe that all good teachers teach character. We're just helping people do it in a more focused way."

John Moss also told of an incident that happened last week in one of his 11th grade classes. He said: "I have a lot of kids who have never read a whole book in their life. So for their first-quarter book report assignment, I said, 'You have to read the *whole* book. If you don't finish the book, I'll have to dock you 15% points on your final grade for the quarter.'" He commented to me that the book report itself was worth only 5% of the quarter grade, so 15% off the total grade was a pretty stiff penalty.

On the day the book report was due, he asked his students to write an in-class, one-paragraph summary of their book and to turn that in with their book report. He said to them: "At the bottom of your paragraph, I would like you to write, if it's true, 'Upon my honor, I have read this entire book,' and to sign your name."

Then he gave them a short talk about integrity. He said:

To me, the most important thing here is that you be truthful. If you graduate from high school with a 4.0 and get a full-ride scholarship to Harvard University but

don't have integrity, you don't have what matters most in life. If you graduate from high school with a so-so average but have integrity and trustworthiness, you have what you need to succeed in life. So don't sell your soul for a few points on your grade.

He also told them a story about a graduate of their high school who had struggled academically but was hard-working and had a reputation for honesty- and went on to become one of the most successful businessmen in the valley.

That night at home, as John Moss was reading his students' book summaries, he came to one on which the student had written: "Upon my honor, I have *not* read this entire book."

"I was really impressed by that," John said. "Well, it turned out I had 18 papers like that, where students wrote that they had not read the entire book."

The next day, he gave his class seat work and called up individually those students who had written on their papers that they had not finished their book. The first conversation, with a boy named Joe, went like this:

Mr. Moss: Joe, I can't tell you how much I appreciate your honesty. I was really impressed by that. Nevertheless, I feel I have to do what I said and dock your grade. But I'm curious, how close did you come to finishing your book?

Joe: I had about 30 pages to go.

Mr. Moss: Hmmm. I'll tell you what. You came pretty close to completing the assignment by the due date, and you've been honest with me. Do you think you can finish the book over the weekend? If you promise to finish it, I'll cancel the 15% penalty and give you a B on the book report.

Joe: I'll finish it!

Mr. Moss: As a matter of fact, I'll enter your grade right now on my computer. [He did, much to Joe's surprise.]

Joe: What do I have to do to prove that I read the rest of it?

Mr. Moss: You don't have to do anything. You just gave me your word that you'll finish it. That's good enough for me.

Mr. Moss then had a similar conversation with the other 17 students who hadn't finished their books and offered them the same deal. They all took him up on it.

Sometime during the next week," he says, "15 of these 18 students came up to me in class or in the hallway and said, 'Mr. Moss, I just want you to know, I read the rest of that book.'"

John Moss adds:

At various times during this year, I've made a big deal about "keeping your word." If they're late for class, I question them about where they were, but I tell them I'll believe what they tell me. I tell them I take them at their word. At first they were surprised by this. They say a lot of other teachers often think they're lying.

How did teacher John Moss teach character through these exchanges? First, in the book report assignment, he set a high work standard: finish the job- read the whole book.

Second, he set a high moral expectation: He asked students to state, on their honor (and here he was teaching an ancient virtue), whether they had in fact finished their book.

Third, Mr. Moss made it absolutely clear to his class that what mattered most to him was that they tell the truth about whether they had read the whole book. He told them that good character matters more in life than good grades. He provided a real-life example, the successful businessman, to illustrate that truth. In all of this, he was serving as a moral model and ethical mentor. The educator Mary Warnock has observed: "For the young to become moral, they must be in the presence of people who take morality seriously."

Fourth, when students admitted not finishing their books, Mr. Moss decided to reward that honesty by giving them another chance to finish their book. This was an act of generosity, of mercy, inspired by his students' display of integrity. Most importantly, he treated them as trustworthy by trusting their promise that they would finish the book over the weekend. Finally, he found other opportunities to enable them to experience first-hand how satisfying it is when someone trusts you enough to take you at your word.

Any teacher can do the kinds of things that John Moss does. But as John Moss himself testifies with regard to his own teaching, having the *intention* to do these things makes them happen more consistently. "I'm having the best year I've ever had," he says. "The respect I'm showing to my students is coming back to me." He says that events like the book report episode are not uncommon, now that he's made character education a central goal of his teaching.

The book report incident shows how high school teachers, like all teachers, teach character through the human curriculum through the hundreds, even thousands, of interactions they have with their students. But they also can teach character through the content of the academic curriculum. Boston University's Kevin Ryan, one of the leading voices in the character movement, observes that when schools set out to do character education, they often go looking for new materials, published kits and the like. These materials, if they are done well, can be useful, but as Ryan points out, schools already have a gold mine of good materials right under their noses in the academic subject matter they teach.

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

History and literature are loaded with moral meaning. William Bennett writes well about this: Do we want our children to know what courage means? Then we should teach them about Joan of Arc, Horatius at the bridge, and Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad. Do we want them to know about kindness and compassion, and their opposites? Then they should read *A Christmas Carol* and *The Diary of Anne Frank* and, later on, *King Lear*. Do we want them to know about persistence in the face of adversity? Then they should know about the character of Washington during the Revolution and Lincoln during the Civil War, and our youngest should read *The Little Engine That Could*. Do we want our children to know about the dangers of unreasoning conformity? Then we should tell them about *The Emperor's New*

Clothes and about Galileo. And if we want them to respect the rights of others, they should read the Declaration of Independence, the Bill of Rights, the Gettysburg Address, and Martin Luther King Jr.'s "Letter from Birmingham City Jail." Clearly, the humanities stand at the center of any character education effort that wishes to ground our children in the best of their civilization.

What are the challenges facing the character education movement? One is sex education. How does character education handle this sensitive and controversial area? Sex is the area of young people's lives where they often display the poorest character—the lowest levels of respect, responsibility, and self-control. As adults, we are gradually emerging from the sexual revolution to recover the wisdom that chastity, which enables us to govern our sexual desires, is one of the essential virtues that serve human dignity and the individual and common good.

Two groups, the Character Education Partnership and the Medical Institute for Sexual Health (MISH), have each recently issued documents designed to help schools apply character education principles to the sexual domain. The MISH publication *National Guide~ lines for Sexuality and Character Education* states: "Premature sexual activity is destructive toward self and others. Character-based sex education should be directive, using thoughtful curricula, accurately interpreted medical data, and ethical reasoning to guide students toward right decisions about sex, namely, toward abstinence." In a similar vein, *Character-Based Sex Education in Public Schools*, the 1997 position paper of the Character Education Partnership, states: "Sex education should teach students to see sexuality as an area of their lives that calls for the presence of virtues. They should be taught that their sexuality must be supported by self-control, a strong sense of responsibility, prudence, and often courage to withstand strong sexual desires. Students should also realize that learning to bring self-discipline to their sexuality is a means of developing character and preparing themselves for a deep, loving relationship as an adult." If character education can help to shape a new moral consensus about sex, especially concerning the sexual moral education of our children, it will have made one of its greatest contributions to the rehabilitation of our nation's moral culture.

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

End Notes

1 *Marriage in America: A Report to the Nation* (New York: Institute for American Values, 1995).

2 For documentation of these trends, see *The Ethics of American Youth: A Warning and a Call to Action* (Marina del Rey, CA: Josephson Institute of Ethics, 1990); T. Lickona, *Educating for Character* (New York: Bantam Books, 1991); and W. Kilpatrick, *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992).

3 *Character Education in U. S. Schools: A New Consensus* (Alexandria, VA: The Character Education Partnership, Inc., 1996), p. 7.

4 Elayne Bennett, *Best Friends* (Washington, DC: Best Friends Foundation, 1994).

5 Child Development Project, Developmental Studies Center, 2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305, Oakland, CA 94606.

6 Medical Institute for Sexual Health, *National Guidelines for Sexuality and Character Education* (Austin, TX: Medical Institute for Sexual Health, 1996).

7. The Character Education Partnership, *Character-Based Sex Education in Public Schools: A Position Statement* (Alexandria, VA: Character Education Partnership, 1996).

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Dr. Thomas Lickona is a developmental psychologist and professor of education at the State University of New York at Cortland. He directs the Center for the Fourth and Fifth Rs (Respect and Responsibility). He has also been a Visiting Professor at Boston and Harvard Universities.

At the Second Annual White House Conference on Character Building, Dr. Lickona was a featured speaker. He is a frequent consultant to schools across the country and has also lectured in Canada, Japan, Switzerland, Ireland, and Latin America. He serves on the Board of Directors for the Character Education Partnership, a national organization dedicated to putting character building at the top of the educational agenda.

Dr. Lickona holds a Ph.D. in psychology from the State University in Albany. His publications include *Moral Development and Behavior*, *Raising Good Children*, *Character Development in Schools and Beyond*, and *Educating for Character: How Our Schools Can Teach Respect and Responsibility*. He also co-authored a book for teens with Judith Lickona and William Boudreau, M.D., *Sex, Love and You: Making the Right Decision*.

In March, 1996, Dr. Lickona spoke to over 250 Georgia educators at the conference "Linking School and Community Through Character Education", sponsored by the Georgia Humanities Council. Since then, he has consulted with several school systems as they implement character education pilot programs.