

The Fourth and Fifth Rs

Respect and Responsibility

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The Virtues Project: Bringing Out Every Child's Inner Goodness

by Linda Kavelin Popov

When I was a young mother raising my two boys in rural South Carolina, I was shocked and saddened to find my children coming home with values which did not fit our family's beliefs. I remember when my 1st-grader, Craig, came home using racist words and making generalizations about people of color. When I questioned him, he spoke about "catching cooties" and other phrases he had heard. We had long talks about seeing with your own eyes and thinking with your own mind. I didn't hear anything more about the dangers of associating with others whose skin was a different color.

As a parent, my job of teaching respect, tolerance, and unity was made harder because these virtues were not being addressed at school. I was also distressed by the fact that my older son was constantly overwhelmed by the noise and confusion of the "open classroom" experiment, a methodology which was launched without much understanding of the changes it required. There were no boundaries in the classroom. When I observed his class, children were running and shouting, my son among them. The noise was deafening. My heart went out to the children and the teacher.

"We're going to learn about three things which everyone has inside: respect, patience, and self-discipline."

The next day, I made an appointment with the principal. He said, "I know this open classroom thing isn't working, but what can I do?" I said, "Would you let me help in a small way?" "How?" he asked. He knew that I was a psychotherapist, working with children and families. I asked, "What is your hardest class, the one with the most disciplinary

problems?" He named the 1st-grade class.

I went to see the 1st-grade teacher, who had already broken into a sweat by 11 a.m. The children were restless. One little girl continually flung herself at the teacher, who kept saying, "Kimmy, stop it." I said, "I'd like to help you out a couple of times a week. Give me the five kids

who are hardest to handle. I'll take them out for a couple of hours twice a week."

She almost cried. She pointed them out, including Kimmy. A couple of days later, I arrived with drawing paper and crayons, a box of raisins, and an idea. The teacher called out the names of the five children, and they gathered apprehensively around me. I knelt down and said, "I'm going to take you to a very special place. You have been chosen by your teacher to come with me." They walked, hopped, and meandered behind me to a tiny supply room in which I had created a circle of child-sized chairs.

"Please sit down," I said. I did a quick scan of their characteristics. Leroy, whose eyes whirled involuntarily, appeared to have some neurological impairment. Johnny was so hyperactive, he was literally attempting to climb the wall behind his chair. Kimmy's clothes were shabby, her hair unkempt, and her body movements agitated. I wondered about possible abuse or neglect. Raymond was slow and obese. Timmy looked very angry.

I sat on the floor before their little circle and said, "We're going to learn together about three very special things which everyone has inside. They are respect, patience, and self-discipline."



I looked only at the four who were paying attention. I ignored Johnny, who was standing on his chair. He suddenly turned around to see if I was watching him. I said, “See how Johnny is looking at me right now and paying attention? That’s the kind of respect I’m talking about.” Johnny looked dumbfounded and plopped down into a sitting position. I said, “This class will be a special time just for us, and when you learn these things—respect, patience, and self-discipline—then you can teach them to the rest of your class.”

Each week, I made words of raisins and popcorn. When the children were able to master the words, their reward was to “eat my words.” They laughed and munched. We focused on simple life skills to help them practice the three virtues. They learned that when the teacher asked for quiet, they were to “stop like a statue.” They loved playing statues and understood that it was a way to show *respect* by following directions.

They learned that if they wanted to respond in class, instead of jumping on the teacher or shouting, they were to put one hand over their mouth and the other in the air. This was a way of showing *self-discipline*.

While the others drew, Kimmy practiced “the magic circle of respect.” Previously, she had no sense of physical boundaries and would jump on people like a monkey. I showed her the invisible circle of personal space which was a way of showing respect for herself and others. When she was able to go for an entire session without jumping on me or the other children, I would hold her in my arms for a long hug. Johnny received special acknowledgments for his self-discipline when he made the effort to pay attention. Raymond showed enthusiasm and excellence in recognizing words. They all began to read within a few weeks. I received reports from the teacher that when these children were back in the classroom, they showed “miraculous” changes.

At the end of the term, with their drawings on respect, patience, and self-discipline in hand, the children

paraded proudly into class. “We are your teachers for today,” Raymond announced. “We will teach you respect,” said Johnny, grinning from ear to ear. “We will teach you patience,” said Kimmy. Leroy and Timmy then demonstrated the left hand up and right hand over mouth technique. We played Respect Statues with the whole class. My kids beamed with pride as the other children applauded wildly.

Based on that simple method of virtues development, the school instituted a program called “ABC: Aiding Behavioral Change.” Other volunteers came forward to keep it going. This early experience was the seed for The Virtues Project, which my husband, my brother, and I founded sixteen years later, in 1991. It has since become a program spanning the globe, spreading the philosophy of drawing out the virtues—the best qualities within our children.

Five Simple Strategies

The secret of The Virtues Project’s success is creating a culture of character that brings out every student’s inner goodness. We teach teachers and parents five simple strategies for doing this:

Strategy 1: Speak the Language of Virtues.

Language shapes character. The words we use have great power to discourage or inspire. Replacing blaming and shaming words with virtues language changes the climate of a classroom or a home. Telling students what we *do* want, not what we don’t want, and using virtues

language to acknowledge and correct, make children aware of the best within them. “That was a kind thing to do.” “What would have happened if you had used your kindness?” (See box for the virtues we teach.)

Strategy 2: Recognize Teachable Moments.

Recognizing teachable moments means capitalizing on everyday events as opportunities to develop the virtues. When normally aggressive children behave peacefully, that is a teachable moment in which to acknowledge their peacefulness. “You were very peaceful during recess,

VIRTUES	
Assertiveness	Integrity
Caring	Joyfulness
Cleanliness	Justice
Commitment	Kindness
Compassion	Love
Confidence	Loyalty
Consideration	Moderation
Cooperation	Modesty
Courage	Orderliness
Courtesy	Patience
Creativity	Peacefulness
Detachment	Perseverance
Determination	Purposefulness
Diligence	Reliability
Enthusiasm	Respect
Excellence	Responsibility
Flexibility	Self-discipline
Forgiveness	Service
Friendliness	Tact
Generosity	Thankfulness
Gentleness	Tolerance
Helpfulness	Trust
Honesty	Trustworthiness
Honor	Truthfulness
Humility	Understanding
Idealism	Unity

Restitution Works

Jeff Grumley, a restitution counselor, works with a large, inner-city school in Illinois. When he introduced restorative justice into the discipline system, there was a 40% drop in discipline referrals within two years. Academic performance in classrooms where restitution was used was 20% higher than in classrooms not using this approach.

Jeff says, "Over 95% of students chose to 'make it right' and repair the damaged relationship with their teachers without any extrinsic motivation. Students want to mend broken relationships with their teachers and peers."

Malcolm." This increases their awareness that they are growing stronger in a challenging virtue. When the same child "forgets" about peacefulness and acts aggressively, that is another teachable moment. "How can you get your friend's attention peacefully?"

Teachers and aides working with special needs students, even those who are severely intellectually challenged, find that these students are very responsive to virtues language. "Sally, you really persevered in putting your sweater on today. It was hard, but you did it!" If Sally throws down the sweater in frustration, the teacher can say, "Sally, putting on that sweater is hard, isn't it? How can you practice perseverance?"

Academic instruction provides many teachable moments. Even very young children can identify the virtues in a story if the teacher asks, for example, "What virtues did Peter Rabbit show?" "Which virtues does Peter need to work on?"

Strategy 3: Create Clear Boundaries and Practice Restorative Justice.

Clear boundaries create a climate of peace and safety. Rules should be based on the behaviors you see and on the behaviors you *want* to see. In order to elicit the virtues, rules should be stated positively ("Walk in the halls"), rather than negatively ("No running").

Consequences should be restorative rather than retributive.

Consequences should be educational—restorative rather than retributive. In retributive justice, the adult is a detective, asking, What was the crime? Who did it? How should they be punished? In restorative justice, the adult is a mentor, asking:

- ◆ *What happened?*
- ◆ *Who was hurt (including the perpetrator)?*
- ◆ *What do they need?*
- ◆ *What amends can be made?*

High school counselor Ray Tufts of the Renton Alternative School in Washington, begins restorative justice by saying, "I want to hear what happened from your point of view." Then he looks up at the virtues poster (box, p. 2) and says, "What virtue could you have used to handle that situation better?" ("I guess I forgot peacefulness.") Then he encourages the student to practice that virtue ("Let's see how peaceful you can be the rest of the day"). Finally, he

asks the student how he could make restitution ("What do you need to do to make it right with John? What do you need from him?").

Strategy 4: Honor the Spirit.

Honoring the spirit means respecting the dignity of every person and making time for reflection, reverence, and appreciation of beauty. We can honor the spirit by looking for and celebrating even a glimmer of goodness in a child. We should also celebrate adults' progress in the virtues. In its front hall, one middle school implementing The Virtues Project displayed photos of teachers with descriptions of their "growth virtues" (e.g., *I am growing in patience. I take a breath and choose to use tactful language*).

Strategy 5: Offer Spiritual Companionship.

Spiritual companionship means being deeply present and listening with compassion. It is a powerful process for healing grief, anger, and trauma. A Native American student once described spiritual companionship as "walking alongside." Boys especially are more open when we walk with them shoulder to shoulder. Spiritual companionship also includes listening without judgment to a child's side of the story. Once we have listened, "what" is the magic word. "What did you feel when you picked up that rock?" "What would have helped you call on your self-discipline in that moment?"

Virtues lie within every child. It is our task, as teachers and parents, to draw them out. ■

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(cont. from p. 6.)

2. Common Practices of Effective Programs

Having identified effective programs, we were interested in what implementation strategies those programs utilized. We identified eleven major strategies: three **content strategies** (explicit character education programs, social and emotional curriculum, and academic curriculum integration) and eight **pedagogical strategies** (direct teaching strategies, interactive teaching/learning strategies, classroom/behavior management strategies, schoolwide or institutional organization, modeling/mentoring, family/community participation, community service/service-learning, and professional development).

3. "Home-Grown" Character Education

There is very little research on home-grown character education despite the fact that most of character education is of this variety. One model for investigating home-grown character education is a study by Jacques Benninga and colleagues (*Journal of Research in Character Education*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2003). Benninga examined the relationship between school-created character education and academic achievement in California elementary schools and found that schools with higher state achievement scores also scored higher on four dimensions of character education: (1) parent and teacher promotion and modeling of good character, (2) quality service-learning, (3) a caring community, and (4) a clean and safe physical environment.

**Character education works—
if implemented well.**

4. Effective Individual Practices

There is little research on individual character education practices. One exception is cooperative learning. Robert Slavin and David and Roger Johnson have amassed more than 100 studies demonstrating the effectiveness of cooperative learning in promoting outcomes such as conflict resolution skills, greater cooperation, and higher test scores. A second exception is moral dilemma discussion; nearly 100 studies have demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting the development of moral reasoning.

Most Consistently Impacted Outcomes

The character outcomes that were most consistently impacted positively (had the highest percentages of positive outcomes) are shown in the box at the right.

From the research, we can conclude the following:

◆ **Character education does work, if effectively de-**

signed and implemented.

◆ **It varies.** Character education comes in many forms: whole-school reform models, classroom lesson-based models, target behavior models (e.g., bullying prevention), integrated component models, and so on.

◆ **It affects much.** As indicated by the "Most Consistently Impacted Outcomes" box below, character education affects various aspects of the "head," "heart," and "hand."

◆ **It lasts.** There is evidence of sustained, even delayed effects of character education. The Seattle Social Development Project (SSDP), Child Development Project, and Positive Action, for example, show long-term effects of elementary school character education through middle school and/or high school, and even, for SSDP, into early adulthood.

◆ **Doing it well matters.** Studies typically find that character education is more effective when it is implemented *fully* and *with fidelity*. It behooves character educators to maximize and assess implementation fidelity.

◆ **Effective strategies can be identified.** Effective programs employ many or all of the following strategies:

✓ **Professional development.** All effective programs build in structures for ongoing professional training.

✓ **Peer interaction.** All effective programs incorporate peer interactive strategies (e.g., peer discussion, role-play, and cooperative learning).

Most Consistently Impacted Outcomes

1. **Sexual behavior (91%, 10 of 11 studies)**
2. **Character knowledge (87%)**
3. **Socio-moral cognition (74%)**
4. **Problem-solving skills (64%)**
5. **Emotional competency (64%)**
6. **Relationships (62%)**
7. **Attachment to school (61%)**
8. **Academic achievement (59%)**
9. **Communicative competency (50%)**
10. **Attitudes toward teachers (50%)**
11. **Violence and aggression (48%)**
12. **Drug use (48%)**
13. **Personal morality (48%)**
14. **Knowledge/attitudes about risk (47%)**
15. **School behavior (45%)**
16. **Pro-social behaviors and attitudes (43%)**

✓ **Direct teaching.** Practice what you preach, but don't forget to preach what you practice.

✓ **Skill training.** Many strategies directly teach social-emotional skills (e.g., conflict resolution).

✓ **Making the agenda explicit.** More than half of the effective programs focus explicitly on character, morality, values, virtues, or ethics.

✓ **Family and community involvement.** Effective programs typically involve families and community members and organizations. This includes parents as consumers (e.g., offering training to parents) and parents and community as partners (e.g., including them in the design and delivery of the character education initiative).

✓ **Providing models and mentors.** Many programs incorporate peer and adult role models (both live and literature-based) and mentors to foster character development.

✓ **Integration into the academic curriculum.** Most of the 33 effective programs (on back page) didn't test for academic gains, but of the eleven that did, ten found significant effects. Especially in the age of No Child Left Behind legislation, we should strive to integrate character education into the curriculum.

✓ **Multi-strategy approach.** Effective character education programs are rarely single-strategy initiatives. The average number of strategies used by the 33 effective programs was seven.

Based on this review and our knowledge of effective practice, we offer nine broad recommendations for maximizing the effectiveness of character education:

1. Choose tested and effective implementation approaches that match your goals.

2. Train the implementers. Research has shown over and over that incomplete or inaccurate implementation leads to ineffective programs.

3. Enlist leadership support. Especially when character education is schoolwide or districtwide, its success depends on support from the principal or superintendent.

4. Assess character education and feed the data back into program improvement. Educators should assess both the outcomes and the implementation processes and consider those data as a means for improving practice.

5. Pay attention to staff culture. Principals often report that they need to first shape the culture among adults before they can effectively tackle character education and the whole-school culture.

6. Build student bonding to school. Character education depends in a large part on the degree to which students become attached to, and feel a part of, their schools.

7. Think long-term and sustain the commitment. James Comer, developer of the School Development Project, claims that it takes at least three years to begin to make a positive impact on a schoolwide culture, and that substantial effects are often seen only after five to seven years.

8. Bundle programs. Many effective character education initiatives combine components of different programs.

9. Include parents and other community representatives.

Helpful resources for parent and community involvement are available at the CASEL (www.casel.org) and Developmental Studies Center (www.devstu.org) websites. ■

The full "What Works in Character Education" report can be downloaded from the Center for Character and Citizenship (www.characterandcitizenship.org) at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. Drs. Berkowitz (berkowitz@umsl.edu) and Bier (bierm@umsl.edu) conduct research and trainings through the Center.

SMART & GOOD HIGH SCHOOLS

Another "what works" report is the two-year study, *Smart & Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond*, by Thomas Lickona and Matthew Davidson. Based on a literature review and site visits to 24 diverse, award-winning high schools, *Smart & Good High Schools* describes nearly 100 promising practices for developing 8 strengths of character. The 227-page report can be downloaded from www.cortland.edu/character.

ATTENTION CHARACTER EDUCATORS:

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What Works in Character Education?

by Marvin Berkowitz and Melinda Bier



A few years ago, with grant support from the John Templeton Foundation and the Character Education Partnership (www.character.org), we examined 109 research studies in an effort to answer the question, *What works in character education?* There are four ways to approach this task:

1. **Identify published programs/curricula that have research demonstrating their effectiveness.**
2. **Identify the components of effective character education programs.** What strategies do effective programs tend to share?
3. **Analyze “home-grown” character education** (developed by schools, rather than commercially published). What do schools do that is effective in promoting character development?
4. **Examine research on individual character education practices** (cooperative learning, moral discussion, etc.).

1. Effective Character Education Programs

We identified 54 character education programs that had research to back them up. We then created a system for scoring the research designs in order to identify those studies that met the standards for research in No Child Left Behind. Through this process, we identified 33 programs (see box below) with scientific evidence supporting their effectiveness in promoting one or another aspect of character development.

Our results indicate that practitioners in search of effective character education programs have a diverse set of scientifically-supported options at every developmental level. Our list overlaps significantly with the programs reviewed by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) in its publication *Safe and Sound* (www.casel.org). That review offers additional information on the implementation characteristics of the programs we have identified. *(cont., p. 4)*

SCIENTIFICALLY SUPPORTED CHARACTER EDUCATION PROGRAMS

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|--|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Across Ages (<i>elementary, middle school</i>) 2. All Stars (<i>middle</i>) 3. Building Decision Skills with Community Service (<i>middle</i>) 4. Child Development Project (<i>elem.</i>) 5. Facing History and Ourselves (<i>middle, high</i>) 6. Great Body Shop (<i>elem.</i>) 7. I Can Problem Solve (<i>elem.</i>) 8. Just Communities (<i>high</i>) 9. Learning for Life (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 10. Life Skills Training (<i>elem., middle</i>) 11. LIFT (Linking the Interests of Families and Teachers) (<i>elem.</i>) 12. Lions-Quest (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 13. Michigan Model for Comprehensive School Health Education (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 14. Moral Dilemma Discussion (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 15. Open Circle (Reach Out to Schools) (<i>elem.</i>) 16. PeaceBuilders (<i>elem.</i>) 17. Peaceful Schools Project (<i>elem.</i>) 18. Peacemakers (<i>elem., middle</i>) | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 19. Positive Action (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 20. Positive Action Through Holistic Education (PATHE) (<i>middle, high</i>) 21. Positive Youth Development (<i>middle</i>) 22. Promoting Alternative Thinking Strategies (PATHS) (<i>elem.</i>) 23. Raising Healthy Children (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 24. Resolving Conflict Creatively Program (RCCP) (<i>elem., middle</i>) 25. Responding in Peaceful & Positive Ways (RIPP) (<i>middle</i>) 26. Roots of Empathy (<i>elem., middle</i>) 27. Seattle Social Development Project (<i>elem.</i>) 28. Second Step (<i>elem., middle</i>) 29. Social Competence Promotion Program for Young Adolescents (<i>middle</i>) 30. Social Decision Making & Problem Solving (SDM/PS) (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 31. Teaching Students to be Peacemakers (<i>elem., middle, high</i>) 32. Teen Outreach (<i>middle, high school</i>) 33. The ESSENTIAL Curriculum (Project ESSENTIAL) (<i>elem, middle</i>) |
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