

# The Fourth and Fifth Rs

## Respect and Responsibility

Volume 5, Issue 2

Spring, 1999

### A Curriculum for Developing World-Class Citizens

Gil and Tanya Gockley, authors and national presenters

With tears running down her face, a senior in high school said to us, "I have all A's, excellent college board scores, was accepted by three colleges, have a boyfriend and a part-time job. Why don't I feel joy?"

We asked approximately 900 middle school students the question, "What is important to you?" They told us, "... getting good grades, performing, winning at sports, wearing the 'right' clothes, being popular, and fitting in." Only one student answered, "Respect."

These stories illustrate the fact that teaching character has taken a back seat to academics, winning, and achieving for far too long. During the 1980s and 1990s, the overwhelming focus in schools became measurable academic performance. Teachers, parents, and students found themselves spending more and more time on aca-

veloping student character means: (1) identifying concepts and standards; (2) teaching and modeling them through a curriculum; (3) integrating them throughout the school day; (4) involving parents and community leaders; and (5) evaluating the implementation of this plan as well as student and adult behavioral changes.

For the past ten years, we have piloted this approach with middle schoolers and developed a curriculum (36 lessons) we call **World Class Citizens**. It teaches the Golden Rule as the foundation for four "cornerstones of good character." (See box.) Concepts such as *student rights and responsibilities*, *problem-solving*, and *seeking the counsel of a trusted adult* are presented through advisor-advisee programs, academic subject areas, enrichment classes, and guidance and counseling.

The effectiveness of this approach can be measured through tests to determine whether the concepts have been learned. Interviews and surveys can be used to identify attitudinal and behavioral changes. When members of the school express that "there are fewer discipline problems" and "there is less blaming, judging, teasing, and verbal abuse," this represents a positive change in the quality of school life. ■

*The Gockleys are authors of World-Class Citizens: A Middle School Character Development Program and Loving is Natural, Parenting is Not (Coleman Press: Tel./Fax: 716/ 242-0688). The Gockleys can be reached at: (716) 244-0424; E-mail: gockley@frontiernet.net.*

#### The Four Cornerstones of Good Character:

Responsibility  
Respect for self and others  
A caring attitude  
Neighborliness

demics, leaving little or no time to foster character, citizenship, and caring relationships. Today, we all feel the void.

But restoring an emphasis on character won't produce results if we proceed in a hit-or-miss manner. Would we go about teaching reading or any other subject without creating standards and a plan for teaching them? De-

Center for the 4th and 5th Rs ♦ Education Department ♦ SUNY Cortland ♦ P.O. Box 2000 ♦ Cortland, NY 13045 ♦ Tel. (607) 753-2455 ♦ <http://www.cortland.edu/www/c4n5rs/> ♦ E-mail: [c4n5rs@cortland.edu](mailto:c4n5rs@cortland.edu)  
Newsletter Staff: Dr. Thomas Lickona, Kevin Conlon, Marthe Seales

This newsletter is supported by a grant from the John Templeton Foundation.

# 12 Ways to Prevent Peer Cruelty

Tom Lickona, Director, Center for the 4th and 5th Rs

Of all the moral experiences the school can provide, none is more important than a young person's experience of being accepted and valued by fellow students. Students learn to care about others when they feel cared about themselves. However, when a student feels rejected by peers, both academic learning and moral development are impeded. Moreover, students who exclude or persecute peers are damaging their own character development by their insensitive or cruel behavior.

What can schools do to address the growing problem of peer cruelty?

## 1. A schoolwide character education effort.

When Winkelman Elementary School (Glenview, IL) faced rising student disrespect toward peers and adults, it launched a character education initiative centered on courtesy and caring. Displays in hallways defined courtesy and caring in terms of everyday behaviors. At every grade level, teachers continually discussed these virtues with their students. Different classes took turns conducting weekly school assemblies on the themes of courtesy and caring. All children were given opportunities to care for others through community service. As a result of this schoolwide effort, school climate improved, put-downs declined, and fights became rare.

*Students learn to care about others when they feel cared about themselves.*

## 2. A schoolwide effort focused on reducing bullying.

In Norway, school bullying has been cut in half by a program that combines: (a) clear rules against bullying behavior; (b) greater adult supervision; (c) classroom discussions of the problem; and (d) increased parental involvement. Parents are notified if their child is either the victim or the perpetrator of bullying, and parents are brought into the problem-solving process.

## 3. Creating a classroom community.

Hal Urban teaches history and psychology at Woodside High School (Redwood City, CA). He takes about five minutes at the start of each class to do four things. First, he asks, "Who has good news?" After a few students share, he asks,

"Is there someone in the class that you'd like to compliment?"

Students become comfortable doing that. Then he asks, "What is something you are thankful for today?" Finally, he has stu-

dents take a different seat and spend a minute getting to know their new neighbor. On the final exam, he asks, "What is something you will remember about this course 10 years from now?" Many say they will remember the way he began each class.

## 4. Rule-setting.

A Skaneateles, New York, 6th-grade teacher begins the year by asking his students to respond in writing to this question: "How would you like to be treated in this class—by me as the teacher and by everyone else?" After students discuss their answers (they'd like to be treated fairly, not made fun of, not left out, and so on), the teacher asks, "How do you think you should treat everyone else in the room?" Students can see it logically follows that they should treat others just as they themselves would like to be treated. The teacher then says: "That's called the Golden Rule: Treat others as you wish to be treated. This will be our most important rule."

## 5. A lesson or curriculum on positive communication.

Some teachers work to prevent peer cruelty through a discussion of name-calling, teasing, and the like. Questions: *Who has ever been treated in this way? How did it make you feel? Why do people say unkind things to others? How can we prevent this from happening in our class? What is a fair and helpful consequence if someone does say something unkind to a classmate?*

Many elementary schools in Central New York have implemented a published curriculum called *No Putdowns* (315-251-1400). This curriculum, designed to be used during the first five weeks of the school year, includes brief daily lessons in which students practice positive communication skills such as complimenting others and not retaliating when someone calls you a name. In schools using this program, name-calling and fights have significantly diminished.

**6. Effective disciplinary consequences for peer cruelty.** In all too many schools, students treat schoolmates abusively, and nothing happens. Clear contracts can help to stop bullying: *"I will not hit anyone. If I do, I will have to call my parents and report what I did."* Have the bully sign the contract.

A Moravia, New York, 5th-grade teacher begins the school year by explaining to her students that courtesy is an important value in her classroom. If a student says something that hurts another child's feelings, she requires that the offending child write a letter of apology to the victim saying *why* the offender is sorry. We can also teach restitution by asking the perpetrator, *"What can you do to make up for the hurt you caused?"*

**7. Empathy training.** Students often need help in developing empathy. When 5-year-old Brian called a Jamaican classmate "Tan Man," the teacher took Brian aside and explained: *"Brian, there are two kinds of hurts: outside hurts that you can see, like a cut or a bruise, and inside hurts that you can't see, like a hurt feeling. The inside hurts hurt more and last longer. When you call John 'Tan Man,' you are causing an inside hurt that makes him very sad. Do you wish to continue to cause this inside hurt?"* Brian said that he didn't.

Preschool and primary-level teachers have also used puppets to portray the negative impact of unkind actions. Good literature (e.g., *The Hundred Dresses*) that depicts the hurtful effects of ridicule and exclusion is another effective way to increase students' empathy.

**8. Cooperative learning.** Studies show that sustained cooperative learning can reduce prejudice and even foster friendships where hostility once prevailed. Two keys to successful cooperative learning are for the teacher and students to list the behaviors that facilitate effective cooperation and then to continually assess how well pairs or groups are working together and how they can improve. Since bullies are deficient in empathy, they can benefit a great deal from cooperative learning.

**9. Cross-age helping relationships.** Students who are cruel need responsible roles that build their character. Having the responsibility to be a "big buddy" to a younger child and to help that child with his or her schoolwork has the potential to change an older student's self-image and behavior. Many schools promote nurturing cross-age relationships through "class adoptions,"

in which an older class buddies up with a younger one.

**10. Appealing to the bully's sense of responsibility.** In his book *Teacher and Child* (1972), Haim Ginott tells the story of Jay, who had been the ringleader of attacks on a 3rd-grade classmate, Andy. The teacher wrote Jay the following letter:

*Dear Jay:*

*Andy's mother has told me that her son has been made very unhappy this year. Name-calling and ostracizing have left him sad and lonely. Your experience as a leader in our class makes you a likely person for me to turn to for advice. I value your ability to sympathize with those who suffer. Please write me your suggestions about how we can help Andy.*

*Mrs. Spaulding*

Jay never replied, but his attacks on Andy ceased.

**11. Social skill training for the victim.** Martin Fleming, author of *For Kidsake*, suggests training victims of bullying to be assertive: "Take a deep breath and think to yourself, *'I can handle this.'* Look the bully in the eye and say, *'Stop bothering me. If you don't stop, I'll report you.'*" Sometimes a student who is a scapegoat behaves in annoying ways that provoke peer abuse. We can privately ask mature students why they think the victim student is the object of peer mistreatment and what the student might do to change the situation. The teacher or counselor can then meet individually with the student to suggest changes. This effort should always be coupled with steps to stop abusive students from inflicting further cruelty.

**12. Student government.** A student council, consisting of elected classroom delegates who meet weekly under the guidance of the principal or a teacher, can take a leadership role in addressing peer cruelty. First, every classroom discusses the problem: *"How can we reduce peer cruelty in our school?"* Then classroom delegates take their recommendations to the student council, which formulates a plan of action. Using this system, elementary students have been able to reduce problems in the cafeteria, on the playground, and on the school bus. Secondary schools have also used this kind of participatory student government to improve the moral environment. A 16-year-old Massachusetts boy comments: *"Kids are getting along better; there aren't as many fights. People are more tolerant—there's not a lot of hatred anymore."* ■

*Have an article you'd like to submit? Send us a disc or e-mail. (See p. 1 for address.)*

# Honesty: Why It's Still the Best Policy

Hal Urban, Teacher, Author, and Speaker

Sadly, we are surrounded today by all kinds of dishonesty. Seeing what we can "get away with" has practically become a sport.

I want my high school students to realize that when we choose to be honest—or dishonest—something happens inside of us. To help them understand that, I first have them write thoughtful answers to a series of questions on honesty. (See box for samples.) After they share their answers in small groups and a whole-class discussion, they read some thoughts of mine on the costs of dishonesty and the benefits of being honest.

## The Costs of Dishonesty

**1. Dishonesty turns us into phonies.** One dishonest act leads to another. Rarely does a person lie, cheat, or steal just one time. If something is gained from it, the temptation to do it again is almost irresistible. Then there's a need to cover our trail with another lie.

**2. Dishonesty always carries a cost.** We pay a price for dishonesty, even if we don't get caught. In *To Thine Own Self Be True*, Dr. Lewis Andrews says lying can put an enormous stress on our body's nervous system.

**3. Dishonesty can't be hidden.** Isn't it true that we usually know when someone is lying to us? People tip

themselves off. Their words say one thing, their bodies another.

**4. Dishonesty ruins relationships.** When we lie to other people, we make it hard for them to believe us in the future. Without trust, good relationships with family, friends, and co-workers are impossible.

**5. Dishonesty prevents our fulfillment.** If we're dishonest, we can never experience the satisfaction of being authentic human beings. This is the worst punishment of all.

## The Rewards of Honesty

**1. Honesty brings peace of mind.** When we're honest, we free ourselves from guilt and stress.

**2. Honesty builds our character and reputation.** Honesty is one of the most admired of all human traits.

**3. Honesty strengthens our relationships.** If dishonesty ruins relationships, honesty cements them together.

**4. Honesty enables us to be authentic.** In St. Augustine's famous *Confessions*, written 1,600 years ago, he explained how, as a young man, he moved up the social ladder by deceiving and manipulating others. One day, while on his way to give a speech that included several lies, he saw a beggar. Augustine wondered why he himself was so discontented and this man with nothing was so cheerful. Then he realized that the beggar was authentic, true to himself; Augustine was not. When we're honest, we experience how good it feels to be true to ourselves. We become what we were meant to be.

After reading these reflections, students again write on the questions about honesty and compare their two sets of responses. As a class, we discuss how their answers may have changed and why. This activity helps them understand why honesty matters in life—that it's essential if they want to have self-respect and fulfilling relationships. ■

*Hal Urban teaches history and psychology at Woodside High School, CA. The above is adapted from his popular book, *Life's Greatest Lessons*, available from the author: 790 Barbour Dr., Redwood City, CA 94062-3014; Tel. (650) 366-2882; E-mail: halurban.com.*

## Reflecting on Honesty

- 1. A prospective employer or college writes to one of your teachers for a recommendation. The writer says, "We know this student has good grades. What about his/her character?" What is character?**
- 2. Is "everybody doing it" a valid reason to do something dishonest?**
- 3. How do you gain the trust of another person? How do you destroy trust in a relationship?**
- 4. What are some of the consequences of being dishonest?**
- 5. What are the rewards of being honest?**
- 6. Do you see any threats to our present society from dishonesty? Explain.**

# The Power of a Compliment

Barbara McCauley-Lovejoy

Mark Twain once said, "I can live two months on one good compliment." Couldn't we all? Let's look at three reasons why compliments are important.

**1. They can encourage others in their pursuit of goals and dreams.** Walt Whitman was discouraged for years about *Leaves of Grass* because no one seemed interested. Then one day he received a letter from Ralph Waldo Emerson complimenting his writing.

*I can live two months on one good compliment.*

—Mark Twain

**2. People tend to do what they get noticed for.** If we can't get attention for doing the positive, many of us will succumb to doing the negative.

As a teacher, it was so easy for me to forget to compliment the students who were either consistently well-behaved *or* frequently misbehaving. Then I came across a helpful way to solve this problem. I made a stack of cards and on each card wrote a child's name. When a student's name was on top, I took a minute to compliment that student and then put that card on the bottom of the stack. If there was a child who needed extra encouragement, I made more cards with that student's name.

Think about the kind of behavior you'd like to encourage in students, family members, co-workers, clerks, neighbors, and friends. Then when you see that behavior, recognize it with a compliment. There's a good chance that positive behavior will be repeated.

**3. We become better ourselves when we compliment others.** We grow when we recognize the goodness in others. I've noticed that people who compliment a certain characteristic in another person seem to have that quality or characteristic themselves. Gracious people are usually aware of gracious people, and honest people are typically aware of honest people.

Words are powerful. Unfortunately, negative words are even more powerful than positive words. Yet

what bombards us in many homes, school hallways, and office buildings? Put-downs, criticisms, sarcastic remarks, and degrading humor.

There is, however, good news: Complimenting is a skill that can be learned. We can get better at complimenting by learning to "scan for red." Try walking into a room and scanning the room for red. You will be amazed at the red objects that you hadn't previously noticed! The same idea will work if we start to look for things to compliment: All kinds of things will start jumping out at us.

A compliment doesn't have to be long to have an impact. In fact, shorter is often better. There are three things we can do to make a compliment powerful:

☺ **Say the person's name and pronounce it correctly.** (Be sure to spell it correctly if writing the compliment.) Most people enjoy hearing the sound of their name, so remembering to say the person's name makes the compliment more personal.

☺ **Be specific.** Rather than tell someone she gave a good speech, mention some part of the speech or delivery that was particularly impressive or meaningful.

☺ **Compliment the unusual.** If a young man is a great football player and everyone knows it, compliment something else about him, such as his quick wit.

## A Compliment Challenge

- ✓ Set a goal of giving 5 compliments a day.
- ✓ To remind yourself, put 5 pennies in a pocket. Each time you compliment, transfer a penny to another pocket.
- ✓ Watch for the results.

Adapted from *Touch a Heart with a Compliment*, available from the author: Barbara McCauley-Lovejoy, Unlimited Horizons, 854 Elm Ave., Salt Lake City, Utah 84106; Phone: (801) 466-1117; E-Mail: [horizons@utah.uswest.net](mailto:horizons@utah.uswest.net).

---

# *Nashua, New Hampshire's Community-Wide Character Initiative*

**Kevin Conlon, Assistant Editor, *The Fourth and Fifth Rs***

**W**e felt that unless we could get the city government and our whole community behind our character education initiative, the efforts by the schools would not succeed.

—Nashua Alderwoman Claire McGrath

Nashua, New Hampshire, with a population of 80,000, began a community-wide character education effort five years ago. Nashua's Board of Aldermen passed a resolution calling upon the schools and the entire community to promote character education.

The resolution led to the formation of a **25-member Character Education Council** that includes the mayor, two aldermen, business representatives, members of the police and fire departments, representatives of sports leagues and service organizations, school administrators, teachers, parents, and youth. The council meets monthly to plan how to promote character education.

Character traits were chosen for each month: **responsibility** (September); **respect** (October); **caring and compassion** (Nov./Dec.); **perseverance** (January); **trustworthiness** (February); **fairness and tolerance** (March); **courage** (April); and **citizenship** (May/June). The council sponsored training for the aldermen, government departments, the school board, and school staff.

Each school has developed its own program centered on the monthly traits, said 6th-grade teacher Jan Kelliher. At her Bicentennial Elementary School, the monthly character education program kicks off with an assembly for the 890 students. Assembly lessons are reinforced through writing assignments and posters in classrooms. The character message is also sent home each month through newsletters, with suggestions for family reading and activities. Kelliher said at one point her school's program was threatened when some faculty felt it was overkill, but it survived the challenge when parents spoke up in support.

Businesses display the **Word of the Month** and re-lated quotes in their storefronts. Printers have donated the printing. Company newsletters and billboards also promote the Word of the Month. A Rotary grant paid for brochures, and the cable TV station has done a series of shows on character.

Mayor Donald Davidson has boosted the character initiative through talks, dedications, and media interviews. He says, "Our culture over the past two decades has taken a swing toward the negative—more rudeness and more dishonesty. Character education is a no-brainer; why wouldn't every community get involved in this? It's opened the eyes of many parents to what they have not been doing."

Alderwoman McGrath also cited positive results: "After implementing character education, one of our schools saw suspensions drop from 32 a year to not a single child. Theft and vandalism also went down."

But McGrath said more must be done to expand the influence of the program. "The biggest problem we have as a city is that too many people still see this as mainly a school initiative. Even though we've had significant community involvement, the whole community really hasn't caught on. The greatest strength has been in the schools, and we hope it will keep spreading." ■

*For more information contact Mayor Donald Davidson at (603) 594-3341; E-mail: davidsond@nashuanh.org, or Alderwoman Claire McGrath at (603) 888-3596.*

***Intelligence is not enough.  
Intelligence plus character —that is  
the goal of true education.***

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

---

**Any part of this newsletter may be duplicated without permission.**