

# The Fourth and Fifth Rs

## Respect and Responsibility

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### Preventing School Violence: What Can We Do?

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

Why so much youth violence? Violence expert David Grossman, in the fall 2000 *National Forum*, reports that the U. S. aggravated assault rate—the rate at which human beings try to kill one another—has increased by a factor of seven since the late 1950s. This increase in violent crime is a worldwide phenomenon. In Canada, the per capita assault rate increased five-fold between 1964 and 1993. In Norway, Greece, Australia, and New Zealand, it increased four- to five-fold between 1977 and 1993. In Sweden, it tripled.

There is only one new variable, Grossman says, present in each of these countries: media violence as entertainment for children. The *Journal of the American Medical Association* (June 10, 1992) reported that historically, after television enters a nation or region, there is an immediate explosion of playground violence. Within 15 years, there is a doubling of the murder rate.

If we want to reduce the destructive effects of media violence, what should we do? First, Grossman says, work toward legislation that outlaws violent video games for kids. (The city of Indianapolis last year passed such an ordinance.) Next, use litigation, as has been done with the tobacco industry, to give the media an economic incentive to curb violent content. Third, and most important, educate parents regarding the impact of violent visual media on children. *Violence is not something we let our kids do for entertainment. Violence kills.*

We can also support legislation aimed at reducing copycat killings. In Japan, Canada, and other democracies, it is a punishable crime to place the names and images of juvenile criminals in the media, because to do so will likely trigger similar youth crimes.

Last year the U.S. Secret Service conducted a study of school shootings; two-thirds of the shooters had felt persecuted, bullied, threatened, attacked, or injured by others. The best way to prevent this kind of peer cruelty is to build community. An article in the spring 1996 *Journal of Staff Development* asserted:

“A Sense of Community Is Key to Effectiveness in Fostering Character Education.” It reported this finding: The more students agree with statements such as “*People in this school care about each other*” and “*My school is like a family,*” the more likely they are to show caring and avoid anti-social behavior.

Schools can reduce cruelty and strengthen community in many ways. The winter 2001 issue of *Reclaiming Children and Youth* carries an article, “Bully-Proofing: What One District Learned About Improving School Climate,” on the use of a bullyproofing curriculum with proven success. Many schools have created a positive peer culture through teacher modeling, quality cooperative learning, classroom community-building, peer mediation programs, conflict resolution training for all students, cross-age service projects, advisory groups (which give every student a home base), and participatory student government (in which all homerooms or classrooms discuss problems and delegates carry proposed solutions to student council). Strategies like these (see this newsletter for further examples), taken together, represent comprehensive character education—one of the best ways to create violence-free schools. □



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# Focusing on Student Outcomes

Maureen Mulderig, Principal

This school year has been full of exciting new character education initiatives at Walberta Park Primary (K-2) School. Over the past two years, several teachers have attended

SUNY Cortland's Institute in Character Education and were enthusiastic about various ways to teach virtues in their classrooms. Subsequently, we started a Character Education Team, now the largest committee in our school.

Not a week goes by that I don't receive some sort of promotional advertisement about character education books, materials, or workshops. It is tempting to start adopting and purchasing these things. However, I feel it is extremely important to start with desired student outcomes in mind. We therefore began our first planning meeting by asking questions such as: "*What are our students like now?*", "*What are they doing and saying?*", "*What do we want them to be like?*" and "*In what areas do we want to see improvement?*"

Our next step was to brainstorm action steps, keeping in mind the outcomes we wanted for our students. (Sample outcomes: *the ability to properly initiate greetings to others and to respond appropriately when greeted, the ability to listen politely to others, and the ability to understand the perspectives of others.*) We filtered out any ideas that would not be best for helping our students reach these goals. We also discussed the fact that so many programs come and that we wanted to be able to sustain whatever we did. We also wanted to avoid add-ons and instead integrate ideas into our existing curriculum and school/classroom routines. As a result, we chose the following initiatives to focus on.

## Cooperative Learning Structures

We provided training for all staff members interested in ways to incorporate cooperative "learning structures" into their classrooms. These learning structures, designed by Dr. Spencer Kagan, are powerful instructional strategies that get students actively engaged with the curriculum. For example, one structure, called a "rallyrobin," has a pair of students take turns talking back and forth. In a math lesson this could be used to brainstorm all the different "names" for a number (e.g., names for 15 in-

clude 10+5, 15-0, etc.) Similarly, in language arts this same structure could be used to have students list words that are verbs. Another learning structure is "numbered heads together." This has students number off (1,2,3), followed by the teacher's posing a question. Students individually write a response, then huddle in their small groups to discuss their answers, making sure that all members know the agreed-upon answer. The teacher then calls a number, and all the students with that number present their answer to the class. (This is an excellent way to review content in a unit or chapter.)

When we use cooperative learning, students work together in teams of four. Emphasis is placed on team building to create a community of learners. Learning structures are used to deliver and review content in all subject areas while simultaneously allowing children opportunities to practice character skills. By integrating these structures into existing lessons, teachers are able to have students practice turn-taking, listening, respect, patience, perspective-taking, and more!

In order to sustain professional development, I find it very important to provide staff with assistance beyond initial training. Therefore, a number of things are in place in our school to help teachers implement the structures. Each month a support group, called the Structure-A-Month (SAM) club, meets. Teachers share ways they used the structure of the month, exchange materials, troubleshoot challenges, and then learn a new structure. In addition, a cooperative learning structure resource library has been started in the main office; teachers can borrow professional books and materials for classroom use. We also have a basket near our copy machine where teachers can swap any sheets they make up for use with a particular structure. As a trainer in Dr. Kagan's structures, I am able to provide demonstration lessons in classrooms and sometimes co-teach a structure with our teachers. We were even lucky enough to arrange a visit to our school by Dr. Kagan himself. Teachers are meeting with much success in using the structures as a vehicle to work on social and character skills without giving up a minute of time from academics.

## Kids Who Care

Every Monday, our school has an assembly program where each class takes a turn performing music, poems,

or a short skit for the rest of the school. We often have guests from the community to speak as well. Morning kindergarten and 2nd-grade students meet every Monday morning. Afternoon kindergarten and 1st-grade students have their assembly in the afternoon.

**B**eginning in January, I asked each class to have one student stay after the Monday assembly for a short meeting with me about our new *Kids Who Care* program. These student representatives are called "ambassadors"; each child gets a turn to represent his or her class for one week throughout the year. Following introductions, I lead children in a discussion in which we use one of the cooperative learning structures (timed pair-share) as the format for the discussion. First students answer the question, "What is going well at our school?" After students discuss this with a partner, they share with the whole group the idea they heard from their partner. These ideas are charted. Next, they address the question, "What could we do better?" and repeat the pair-share process. At the conclusion of the discussion, one idea is selected from the list of things we could do better, and that becomes the goal for their group for that week. Children have generated some great goals:

1. *Invite others to play with you.*
2. *Say only nice things to others.*
3. *Be polite by saying "please" and "thank you."*
4. *Share.*
5. *Clap to show appreciation for others.*
6. *Walk quietly in the hall.*
7. *Be a polite listener.*
8. *Practice good sportsmanship.*
9. *Be honest.*
10. *Take turns.*

The students then follow me to the office, where we quickly make copies of the chosen goal so that each can take it back to class and report what will be worked on throughout the week. Ambassadors each receive a button to wear all week and to take home at the conclusion of their week as ambassador. Staff members (aides, specials teachers, psychologist, etc.) who are not classroom teachers each receive a copy of the goal so that everyone is aware of what the children are working on. Staff then work throughout the week to reinforce the goal with the children. I often use the morning announcements to remind students as well. Many teachers have even made the goal a regular part of their parent newsletters so families can reinforce the goal at home.

**T**he children love the *Kids Who Care* program and can't wait to be ambassador. Through it, a real awareness of the importance of the virtues has arisen in our school. The program seems to have achieved our main goal of fostering students' ownership and responsibility when it comes to character education.

### *A New School Song*

As we leave our Monday assemblies, we now sing "The School Song" by Glenn Colton. This song portrays the values we are trying to instill in the children. Its refrain:

*I will not hurt anyone on the inside.  
I will not hurt anyone on the outside.  
I will respect you and me, it's our responsibility,  
'cause we're a part of this community!*

One class volunteered to learn the song and teach it to our whole school at a Monday program. Music teachers had children practice it in music class. It is displayed on our cafeteria wall as well.

### *Staff Role-Modeling Self-Inventory*

Early on, our Character Education Team focused on the need for us to be good role models as adults. We designed a short questionnaire for staff to use in reflecting on how well they are doing as role models. The inventory includes seven questions such as, "Do I greet the children by name and do I make eye contact with them?" and "Do I acknowledge and celebrate differences in students and staff (e.g., in religion, class, ethnic background, and race)?" This questionnaire has been distributed a few times in different formats as a reminder through the year. Staff are asked to reflect privately; answers are not shared.

### *Walberta Cares!*

This is the name of a bulletin board in our front lobby. We display photos, thank you notes, and other information related to our many community projects. This year we collected toys for underprivileged children during the holidays, had two canned food drives, collected pennies for patients (\$310), and donated baskets full of goodies to an auction to benefit a local hospital. We are also working on plans to adopt a local senior center as yet another way to help our community. We'll conclude this school year by having an appreciation program for our bus drivers, cafeteria staff, custodial staff, and buildings/grounds crew. □

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# Building a Classroom Community

Marty Kaminsky, Teacher and Author

Several times a year I stand staring in disbelief at my television as the news from another CNN special report shatters the early morning stillness. Some high school student or a disgruntled day trader or other innocuous-seeming soul has gone on a rampage. Again. The gunman has killed members of his own school or work community because he felt scorned, pushed aside, and devalued. What can a classroom teacher like myself do to prevent the next killing spree?

Our classrooms are miniature communities. Six hours a day, 182 days a year we can make a difference in the lives of every child we teach. How? By building a classroom community in which every child feels important, respected, and valued.

This is especially important today because so many children spend so much time alone in their rooms with their TV and computer screens. And so many are hustled out of the house at 7:00 a.m. to before-school programs only to be returned at 6:00 p.m. by overwhelmed parents to dinner in front of a cartoon show. Because our children are alone much of the time, they desperately need to belong to something, somewhere.

## "Welcome Back to School"

To build a classroom community a teacher must establish a climate that values all members: children, teachers, parents, and guardians. In late August I send home a "Welcome back to school" letter to the children and parents of my new class. First, I touch upon the highlights of our upcoming 4th-grade adventure. Then I address parents: *"Parents and teachers are allies working for the same goals: the social and academic growth and well-being of our children. We are teammates in this important experience."* I welcome the input and involvement of parents.

The first day of school and every day thereafter I sit the children down and conduct a morning meeting. For at least 15 minutes, we share the birth of kittens, the loss of a tooth, a goal scored to win the soccer game. We all listen quietly and ask questions. Through this act we are saying: *"You are part of us; you are welcome here."* Some days we play cooperative group games in which we are all roaring lions, mooing cows, and hissing snakes during the game of "Find Your Herd." On

other mornings we sing songs or solve a math puzzle together.

## *When One Hurts, We All Do*

During class meetings no one may sit off to the side, doodle absentmindedly, or stare vacantly. Of course, there are times when children arrive at school hurting from taunts on the bus or angry about a playground incident. In a community, when one is hurting, we are all hurting. Our class meetings have often served to help students resolve these problems. We discuss the whole range of 4th-grade woes, from being excluded from sitting with pals at lunch to being made fun of because of a certain haircut or style of sneakers. We role-play and put ourselves in the shoes of the victim. ("What does it feel like to sit by yourself at lunch?")

Each year, my classes and I write our own contract with a full set of rights, responsibilities, rules, and consequences. I guide the discussions. Classes have always devised contracts which are fair and meaningful. I find that when children make and agree to the rules, they are more likely to follow them.

## *Celebrating Every Person*

We also celebrate individual accomplishments. Children read their poems, stories, reports, and creative solutions to math problems. When they are done, we applaud, tell them what we learned and enjoyed, and offer constructive suggestions. At birthday time we celebrate the person all day and write a class poem. Each line begins with: *What I love about (name) is . . .*

As in any community, we have our good days and our bad days. There are times when homework is lost on the bus, apologies are offered but not accepted, and the teacher has a headache and is cranky beyond belief. But we are a community, and we work through the bad days together and start anew tomorrow. By building classroom communities, we make the world a better place one child at a time. □

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# Maxim-izing Your Life

Matt Davidson and Phyllis Smith-Hansen



Whatma Gandhi once said, "The heart learns what the hand does." Like Gandhi, we believe that the three parts of character—the head, the heart, and the hand—influence each other. In fall, 1999, we began a project—"Maximizing Your Life"—designed to use maxims to integrate the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of character education.

Maxims are pithy phrases that capture a fundamental truth. The maxim "Look to the old to learn the new" played a central role in guiding our intervention activities. We wanted to connect 6th-grade students to the old moral wisdom and to the older persons who exemplified that wisdom. We also wanted to instill in these students a sense that they were responsible for passing the torch to those younger than them.

## Senior Mentors Activity

In the first quarter, students worked with a senior citizen in an activity to build community. Students and their senior mentors came together, each bringing an item of personal importance. For example, seniors brought wedding pictures and items from their one-room school-house experiences. Students brought family treasures such as an old violin, signed memorabilia, and collectibles such as dolls and trading cards.

Students also worked in pairs to interview senior mentors about the importance in their lives of core values—especially responsibility—and maxims that expressed these values. Students prepared an interview

that asked seniors: "What were your responsibilities when you were in sixth grade?", "What were the consequences if you didn't live up to your responsibilities?", and "What have your life experiences taught you?" Later, students worked in groups to write up their interviews.

## Peer Mentoring Activity

Sixth-graders then became the bearers of moral wisdom to their younger peers. They typically worked in pairs using children's literature to teach 2nd-graders about core values and related maxims. One pair taught perseverance using the maxim "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again" as illustrated by the story *The Little Engine That Could*. Another taught responsibility using the Dr. Seuss book *Horton Hatches The Egg*. For 6th-graders, being the authority on anything is a rare and coveted opportunity. Through this experience, they came to see their own role in the cycle of preserving and passing on the riches of moral tradition.

## Public Presentation for Parents

The final activity was a presentation before parents, friends, and the students' senior mentors. Each student shared the maxim he or she had chosen to be a special "guiding maxim" in their life and told the story of the people and convictions that led to that decision. This event proved to be particularly moving as it combined the major influences in the students' lives: parents, friends, and mentors. If emotional commitment is the bridge between knowing what's right and living it, this culminating experience helped these 6th-graders cross that bridge.

## Sample Project Maxims

- It's better to give than to receive.
- Conceive it, believe it, achieve it.
- Where there's a will, there's a way.
- You reap what you sow.
- Any job worth doing is worth doing well.
- Two wrongs don't make a right.
- Failing to plan is planning to fail.

In the end, students came to appreciate the complexity of maxims. As one said, "Maxims are sayings that make you think about more than just what it says. 'Don't judge a book by its cover' doesn't just mean 'Don't judge a book.' You have to think about people, too." n

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# The Heart of Character Education

Leslie Laud, Researcher and Learning Specialist

A teacher leading a group of students down the hall stops to pick up gum off the floor and comments, “I’d better pick this up so that nobody steps in it.” Students mimic a peer who stutters, and the teacher intentionally calls on this student when she knows he has the right answer so his classmates can see his strengths. As students arrive, their teacher welcomes them with personal comments (“We really missed you yesterday”).

In my research I have explored the question, “How do good teachers nurture character?”<sup>1</sup> To answer this, I observed exemplary teachers known for how well they develop character. I expected to focus on strategies, programs, and curricular innovations—practices that could be clearly identified and replicated. Instead, my research found that the most salient influences on students’ character appeared to be the values individual teachers embodied and modeled in the presence of children.

Through their example, teachers create a classroom tone that is positive, warm, and inviting of respectful and responsible behavior. After several weeks of research, I identified 627 “moral moments” that could arguably build character. Of these, 602 reflected personal qualities embodied by the teacher such as warmth, responsibility, respect, and compassion. The remaining 25 included skillful use of the curriculum or activities designed to build character such as songs, group work, or jobs.

## We Teach Who We Are

While strategies and teaching techniques are important, they pale in comparison to the potentially enormous influence of the teacher’s own character. As the old saying puts it, “We teach who we are.” Other research on good teachers has also found that values are internalized not so much through instructional methodology as through the teacher’s way of thinking and being.

One teacher I observed spoke of her own struggle to model patience and self-control when her students misbehaved. She illustrates what I now see as the most essential and powerful element of any character education program: the teacher’s personal journey toward developing his or her character. This teacher used a charac-

ter education program, but she did not rely primarily on it. Instead, when frustrated with her students’ inability to exhibit self-control, she examined her own behavior in this area and found she came up short. She asked herself, “If we as adults can’t control ourselves, how can we expect our students to control themselves?” As she worked to model greater patience, she said she saw a steady improvement in her students’ behavior.

## Teaching Heart to Heart

When these teachers did explicitly teach values that they themselves were practicing, their students gained an experiential understanding of those values by observing the teacher’s example. When teachers directly teach values that they have internalized, they teach from a level that is not just cognitive; they teach “heart to heart.” Students more readily accept their instruction because they view them as sincere and genuine. Teaching character in this way is consistent with what is known about good teaching in general: Learning must begin with actual experience.

Another teacher taught lessons on conflict resolution that centered on how to take a peer’s perspective. Her students were amazingly adept at this skill. During an interview, she explained that this is a skill she constantly works on in her personal life with her husband and children. Working on this skill herself must have given her a familiarity with the challenges one might face when trying to practice it, and this helped prepare her to teach this skill so effectively.

## The Most Humbling Task

Many of us have searched for the ideal way to develop character. While I still appreciate the importance of actively developing character through building community and using appropriate strategies and lessons, my research has brought home to me the realization that we teach person to person, not program to person. The most exacting, humbling, and rewarding task in character education is nurturing our own character. n

<sup>1</sup> Laud, L. (2000) *How Good Teachers Nurture Character*. Doctoral dissertation. Teachers College, Columbia University.

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