

## ABOUT CSEE

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## THE WHAT, WHY, AND HOW OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

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BY EDWARD F. DEROCHE, PH.D.

### The What

In 1993, the Josephson Institute of Ethics sponsored a meeting in Aspen, Colorado, at which national leaders discussed the “state of moral decline” and what could be done about it. The 28 leaders proposed a common set of values that would transcend cultural, political, economic, and religious lines. The results of this meeting led to what has been called the Aspen Declaration on Character Education.

According to the Declaration, effective character education is based on core ethical values rooted in democratic society, in particular, respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, justice and fairness, caring, and civic virtue and citizenship. The premise was: “People do not automatically develop good moral character, therefore, conscientious efforts must be made to help [them] develop values and abilities necessary for moral decision making and conduct” (Murphy, 1998, p. 22; Josephson Institute 1993).

A year later, the Character Education Partnership (CEP) formed, its main purpose being to bring people together to help develop good character and civic virtue in schools and communities across the nation. These two efforts followed after four decades of events leading to the current character education efforts in schools, described by DeRoche and Williams (2001).

Thus, character education is an “intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts, and states to instill in their students important core, ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others...” and “to develop students socially, ethically, and academically by infusing character development into every aspect of the school culture and curriculum, and to help students develop good character, which

includes knowing, caring about, and acting upon core ethical values...” ([www.character.org](http://www.character.org)).

Lickona and Davidson (2005) recently proposed a new paradigm for character education, focusing on two elements: performance character and moral character. Performance character relates to one’s mastery and thrust for excellence in school, the workplace, and in other experiences. Here the authors use virtue words such as effort, diligence, perseverance, and self-discipline. Moral character is relational and ethical; it concerns how one treats others in interpersonal and social matters. The virtue words used here include integrity, justice, caring, respect, and empathy.

### The Why

Ryan and Bohlin (1999) developed five arguments favoring the implementation of character education programs. Their first argument centers on the “intellectual authorities” in human history such as Plato, Aristotle, Kant, Dewey, Confucius, Buddha, and Lao-tzu. All called for teaching the young the positive virtues of life and attending to the formation of their character. The writings of Jefferson, Madison, Adams, Franklin, and others frame the authors’ second argument—the benefit to a civil and civic society. Add to this list Horace Mann, the “father of public schools” who promoted academics (reading, writing, and computing), and emphasized the need for and importance of character. “Like Jefferson, Mann believed that training in character would produce responsible and virtuous citizens...” (Gibbon, 2002, p. 33).

A third argument posed is labeled the “law-based argument.” In most states, there are laws or education codes supporting character education efforts. To put it

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another way, the authors note: “no state codes of education...discourage character education” (p. 21).

Public support of character education is the basis for their fourth argument. For decades, the public has expressed a particular interest in having schools address matters related to character (Elam, Rose, and Gallup, 1993; Elam and Rose, 1995).

Ryan and Bohlin label their fifth argument the “inevitability argument,” noting that “children cannot enter the educational system at the age of four and stay until age of sixteen or seventeen without having their character and their moral values profoundly affected by the experience...” (p. 22).

A sixth reason, the state of American culture, may be added to Ryan and Bohlin’s five. Lickona (2004)

An umbrella is a useful metaphor for what character education looks like in most schools. The umbrella’s handle may be said to represent the agreed-upon core character virtues. It is this “handle of virtues,” along with the mission, expectations, and leadership, that supports the umbrella’s eight panels, and practiced.

discusses this concern under the term “cultural indicators”; he includes increases in violence, divorce, fatherless homes, unwed mothers, teen cheating, stealing, lying, television watching, and the impact of the media.

Federal funding is a final reason supporting the case for character education programs. Since 1995, the federal government has funneled millions of dollars into state agencies to support character education efforts. For example, the No Child Left Behind Act expanded funding for the “Partnerships in Character Education Program” from \$8 million to \$24 million ([www.ed.gov/programs/charactered/resources.html](http://www.ed.gov/programs/charactered/resources.html)).

### The How

The final foundational question addresses ways character education is organized and implemented in elementary and secondary schools. Two frameworks provide a template for a comprehensive character education

program. Ryan and Bohlin’s character education framework (1999) recommends that character education activists and school stakeholders address such factors as mission, core virtues, partnerships, teamwork, implementation, meetings and assessment, staff development, student involvement, extra-curricular activities, and evaluation.

DeRoche and Williams (2001) proposed nine keys to successfully implementing a comprehensive character education program: leadership, expectations, school climate, implementation criteria, standards, training, partnerships, resources, and assessment.

An umbrella is a useful metaphor for what character education looks like in most schools. The umbrella’s handle may be said to represent the agreed-upon core character virtues. It is this “handle of virtues,” along with the mission, expectations, and leadership, that supports the umbrella’s eight panels. The eight panels, in this scenario, show where the core virtues and other life skills are taught, nurtured, modeled, and practiced. With slight variations the pattern represented by the umbrella panels include:

- 1) academic achievement
- 2) curriculum
- 3) classroom climate
- 4) co-curricular programs
- 5) instruction
- 6) partnerships
- 7) school culture, and
- 8) special programs (anger management, conflict resolution, anti-bullying programs, ethical decision making, and so forth).

Many “schools of character” use most of the factors in the framework and all of the elements in the umbrella metaphor. Examples can be found in a listing of award-winning schools on the Character Education Partnership Web site ([www.character.org](http://www.character.org)).

The evidence shows that effective, comprehensive character education programs in schools improve student academic achievement and promote positive social behaviors. Character development efforts reduce student at-risk behaviors and the rate of suspensions,

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## LINCOLN'S VIRTUES: AN ETHICAL BIOGRAPHY

*William Lee Miller*

BY RICHARD BARBIERI

The Lincoln bicentennial, which has occasioned the fifteen thousandth book on the man, is a good time to read about Father Abraham. For those interested in moral development as well as history, there is no better book than William Lee Miller's.

Miller announces his aim at the start: "The story of his rise to power has been told many times; it is told here, selectively, for its moral meaning." Beginning with his boyhood, and ending with the First Inaugural, Miller seeks the roots and the flowering of Lincoln's ethical views. The result is an exceptional kind of book, one that may only be possible when the subject is as rare and fine as Lincoln himself.

In Miller's view, Lincoln is not simply a moral individual, but is "quite an extraordinary thinker, on moral-political subjects, with both depth and power." The point is developed with care: "The prime quality of his mind was not *speed*—which in the different world a century and more later would be thought to be almost the defining feature of intelligence. It was also not *breadth*—the embrace of the best that has been thought and said in the world of learned persons.... Lincoln's mind instead cut deeply, perhaps slowly or at least with effort and concentrated attention, into a relatively few subjects. It was *purposive*—personally, politically, morally."

Miller argues that Lincoln believed in a "virtue ethic," seeing moral traits as "gems" of his "character." Shaftesbury appears to underlie Miller's emphasis on Lincoln's intrinsic moral sense: "Lincoln, man and boy, had an unusually intense sympathy with the sufferings of his fellow creatures.... This sympathy extended also, as is not always the case with animal lovers, to his fellow human beings." As one example, Miller notes that "young Lincoln lived his adolescent years in an almost entirely white world; there were only five Negroes in all of Spencer County in 1820." Yet when barely in his twenties, he helped one of the few black men he met, a barber, to obtain work,

befriended him, and remained in touch with "Billy the barber" for the rest of his life.

That temperamental morality was, of course, elaborated by Lincoln's "rare powers of concentration," seen in the familiar (but altogether true) images of Lincoln the avid reader: "The other side to young Lincoln's remarkable shaping of himself—the positive side, as it were—was his stunning work of self-education." Though he never read Kant, Lincoln saw much through the lens of duty, though tempered by his lifelong commitment to politics: "An unattached philosopher or advocate may ask simply, What is right? What is the good? An engaged politician must ask, What aspect of the right and the good is possible under these circumstances?"

Miller often examines Lincoln's ethical choices by asking what we might do, offering a situation and multiple alternatives, as if in a classroom. He reminds us, for example, that Lincoln's forbearance in condemning slavery without damning the slave owners is a rarity: "When we strive for some great good, or oppose some great evil, it is extremely difficult not to spill out some of the goodness onto ourselves and the evil onto our opponents, creating a deep *personal* moral gulf."

In the end Miller seeks to show us that Lincoln was not born a moral exemplar, but made himself such by a long process of self-development: "this young Hoosier had fewer face-to-face original powerful moral influences than most human beings do, and...he shaped himself, by his conscious choice, more than most human beings do." For those engaged in the lives of partly-shaped young people, this book offers a paradigm and an inspiration. ✨

*Richard Barbieri, after seven interim headships, is giving himself a well-deserved sabbatical this school year to read and relax, write and reflect. Barbieri can be contacted at richarde.barbieri@gmail.com.*

# 2009 COMMUNITY SERVICE RECOGNITION EXEMPLARY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PROGRAMS

## WINNER

THE HEWITT SCHOOL (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)  
LINDA MACMURRAY GIBBS, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
DARA BROXMEYER, ISABELLE DE TRABUC, CARRIE STARR,  
SERVICE COORDINATORS

The Hewitt School's community service program is guided by the school's mission to "broaden students' perspectives and increase their awareness of problems" in a variety of areas. One admirable characteristic that helps the school stand out is that service at Hewitt is not limited to students; the Hewitt faculty members model engagement in service by also being involved in service projects. A third impressive factor is Hewitt's ongoing evaluation, and fine tuning, of what seems to be working in the program and what does not. All four of these components are integral not only to quality service endeavors, but also to great moral development programs. Hewitt's program aims both to challenge students and to foster on-going relationships with community agencies.

Among a host of other, shorter-term projects, Hewitt students in grades K-3 make 75 to 100 sandwiches per week, on "Sandwich Fridays," for a community agency, while those in grades 4-6 volunteer in conjunction with Children for Children to do service learning projects with a local public school. Though the entire school has recently begun a "Hewitt Goes Green" campaign, the initiative is led by 4th, 5th, and 6th grade students.

## SECOND PLACE

MARYMOUNT SCHOOL OF NEW YORK (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)  
CONCEPCION ALVAR, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
SR. CLEVIE YOUNGBLOOD, DIRECTOR OF SERVICE  
SUSAN T. JOHNSON, ASSOCIATE HEAD OF SCHOOL

The mission-driven service program in Marymount's lower and middle schools intentionally fosters awareness of others and their needs, in acknowledgement of the school's goal to help students of the school community learn to respond compassionately. Projects are long standing and—extending the ministry work of the Religious of the Sacred Heart of Mary, the school's founders—aim primarily to support women and children in need. The entire Marymount program is integrated into the religious studies and social studies curricula. Two specific long-standing programs, one local and one global, are known to all students. Through the Incarcerated Mothers Program, students collect food for the children and other family members of women in prison. A global initiative, now ongoing for over a half century, supports educational ministries in Zimbabwe.

## HONORABLE MENTION

THE BLAKE SCHOOL (MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA)  
JOHN GULLA, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
BETH S. HOWER, LOWER SCHOOL DIRECTOR  
NAN PETERSON, SERVICE DIRECTOR

Like other great programs, including the two listed above, the Blake School's service endeavors are mission driven. At Blake, however, the service program has its own mission statement, in order "to keep everyone unified" in their service endeavors. Students are involved by identifying projects needed in the community: issues they note through their exposure to the media, sometimes even on the way to school, or that they learn about through community leaders or experts who visit the school to talk about community needs. Projects are both local and international in scope. Seventy-five percent of service activities at Blake have ties to the curriculum and the program has an extensive, and exemplary, evaluation process.

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MERCY HIGH SCHOOL (SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA)  
DOROTHY MCCREA, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
\$30,000

Mercy High School has been educating young women since 1952. Indeed, the school's mission is: "to prepare young women who will make a difference in the world." The student body is a vibrant reflection of the city's diversity in both cultural backgrounds and socioeconomic status. Nearly half of Mercy's families receive financial assistance for tuition. A number of Mercy graduates are the first family members to attend college. The school has a strong tradition for social justice and, more recently, innovative work in environmental awareness; the school's ecological efforts have brought it both local recognition in the media, and a national reputation. Kitchen and student lunch food scraps are composted, materials are recycled, unnecessary lights are turned off, and students have focused on elimination of plastic bottles on campus.

Though many of the school's core values stem from the charism of its founding sisters and their own secondary education association, in addition to a very "on board" faculty, the school has only recently discovered its need to build a more comprehensive system of instilling those values.

Through this grant, the school will identify a teacher to work with the principal and the larger body of teachers to help coordinate efforts. Goals will be set with a special eye both to seeing how the program can be linked to the school's established community service program and how they can be incorporated into the curriculum. Environmental and social justice programs will continue to be an integral part of the school. The goal is not to change the basic good things about our school, but to make all parts of it work better.

An assessment program, done primarily via occasional surveys, will aim to help understand the extent to which Mercy successful in its endeavors. Assessment will look at concern for others, attachment to school, concern for the environment, and goals in life, in addition to other factors.

GRACE CATHEDRAL SCHOOL (NEW YORK, NEW YORK)  
GEORGE DAVISON, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
\$20,000

Common values are the core of family-school relationships at Grace Church School, whose current student population represents a diverse mix of religious beliefs, as well as non-religious students. Given Grace Church School's demographics, resources and urban location, the school will use this impetus to develop itself into an exemplar of active and engaged character education and service learning in a diverse, pluralistic society.

In 2006, the Board of Trustees adopted a long-range plan that included the goal to "strengthen Grace Church School's commitment to teach each student to be a person of character as well as of academic accomplishment." Establishing a more formal, coordinated and comprehensive character education program that articulates common values and incorporates a strong service learning component will serve to implement that goal.

The school's comprehensive approach to character education will be crafted by a variety of constituents, including involvement by parents; this committee will look at the school's existing programs and at other schools that already have established model character education, with a special emphasis on service learning programs. The committee will work to articulate a) what common values the school will reinforce, b) the specific components of the character education program to support those values, and c) specific service-learning opportunities to enhance and reinforce the core values and character attributes the school decides to focus on.

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## COMMUNITY SERVICE RECOGNITION CONTINUED FROM P. 4

HONORABLE MENTION  
THE ENSWORTH SCHOOL (NASHVILLE,  
TENNESSEE)  
WILL MOSELEY, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
BRUCE LIBONN, LOWER SCHOOL HEAD  
ROC BATTEN, SERVICE DIRECTOR

Ensworth's commitment to service learning, as with the other schools noted here, is rooted in the school's mission to inspire students to be contributors to society. In celebration of Ensworth's 50th anniversary last year, the entire school community partnered with the local branch of Habitat for Humanity to build four homes in the Nashville area. Students at every grade—along with faculty, parents, alums and friends—worked on the project. The Habitat for Humanity connection is long-standing; Kindergarten children have been collecting pennies for the non-profit for 15 years (over a million in all, so far!), and have helped carry gravel for sidewalks and driveways. Children in other grades have long-standing relationships with other organizations, providing assistance to premature babies (knitted caps for warmth), abandoned pets, and disadvantaged or disabled children, among others. Like the other schools recognized this year, Ensworth looks for projects that are meaningful, in the sense that the relationship can both be helpful and allow Ensworth students to develop ongoing relationships with specific agencies. ❁

## CHARACTER AWARDS CONTINUED FROM P. 5

SEACOAST ACADEMY (HAMPTON FALLS,  
NEW HAMPSHIRE)  
SCOTT VOTEY, HEAD OF SCHOOL  
\$10,000

Seacoast Academy opened in the fall of 2007 as a day school serving grades six, seven and eight. From early on, a standing committee of the Board of Trustees devoted time to how the school's five core values—honesty, respect, diligence, celebration, and caring—might most effectively be modeled, encouraged and recognized in the daily life of the School. Parents will be integrally involved, as the Parent Advisory Committee, created a year before the school opened, helped shape the direction of the School and created many policies including "The School-Home Partnership," a document that lays out expectations for faculty, administrators, and parents, as they look together toward students' academic and personal development.

Seacoast's outline of plans for the coming several months show a considerable understanding essential components, including an assessment schedule for early stages, ongoing professional development for faculty, and full integration of character education and community service.

This spring the entire faculty and board of trustees will educate themselves about the essentials of comprehensive character education. The school's program will include a professional development workshop for faculty and trustees, the creation of a committee (including a parent volunteer coordinator), a leadership program for rising eighth graders, and a September initiative that will bring together board members and parents to discuss how the character education program will engage new students and build on the momentum created by last year's experience with Rachel's Challenge.

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# RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS & OBSERVANCES

JUNE 2009

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9	10	11	12	13
14	15	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23	24	25	26	27
28	29	30				

See additional details, including holy days for the month of May, at [www.csee.org](http://www.csee.org)



## June 7 Christianity Trinity Sunday

Falling on the Sunday after Pentecost, Trinity celebrates the belief in an eternal God, existing in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

## June 11 Roman Catholicism Corpus Christi

Corpus Christi, a Latin term for “body of Christ,” is a feast to honor the Eucharist, a sacrament of consecrated bread and wine that commemorates the Last Supper that Jesus shared with his disciples before he died on the cross.

## June 14 Orthodox Christianity All Saints

In Eastern Orthodox and Catholic traditions, All Saints is celebrated on the Sunday following Pentecost. It is a day to commemorate all saints collectively.

## June 16 Sikhism Martyrdom of Guru Arjan Dev

Guru Arjan Dev was the fifth of the Sikh Gurus and the first martyr. From his death forward, Sikhs armed themselves to fight for their beliefs. The dagger—often a ceremonial dagger never intended for use—that many Sikhs wear today relates to this historical time.

## June 19 Roman Catholicism Sacred Heart of Christ

Saint Margaret Mary Alcoque (1647-90), a French nun, had visions of Jesus in which he asked her to have others focus on devotion to his heart, an image that represents the infinite goodness and love of Jesus.

## June 24 Christianity Birth of Saint John the Baptist

This day commemorates John the Baptist, who called men to penance and baptism on the banks of the Jordan River. When Jesus came to be baptized, John recognized him as the Messiah and inspired many to follow him. John was later beheaded by Herod Antipas, the tributary king of Perea and Galilee.

## June 29 Christianity Saints Peter and Paul

This day is a feast commemorating Saints Peter and Paul, who were pillars of the church founded by Christ. Both men were martyred. June 29 is said to be the day their relics were moved to save them from the hands of persecutors.

## June 29-July 3 Zoroastrianism Ghambar Maidyoshem

These days mark Ghambar Maidyoshem, a time to celebrate the sowing of seeds, the creation of water, and the grain harvest. ✨

## CHARACTER STRENGTHS AND ETHICAL DECISION MAKING

A fitting metaphor for the challenging realities of adolescent ethical decision-making is the “rider on the elephant.” Jon Haidt, professor of moral psychology at the University of Virginia, sees the rider as logic, the reasoning mind, and the elephant as emotion. The rider helps steer, but despite all the pulling of the reins, the stronger elephant may decide the course. When the rider can control the elephant, it means that appropriate decisions are guided and controlled by using the positive emotions of joy, contentment, awe and elevation, gratitude, and love, or the negative emotions of fear, anger, disgust, shame, and guilt.

Character strengths can assist the rider in controlling the elephant’s evolutionary urges. Aristotle identified six states of character in humans. Brutishness (almost pre-human, wanton irresponsibility), defective character (self-indulgence), and weakness of will (incontinence) are lower level states that resemble the control of the elephant. Strength of will and character excellence are correlates to the mature rider. Heroic virtue is the sixth state. The greatest tension in adolescents tends to be between acting with weakness of will and acting with strength of will. A student acting out of weakness of will wants to act virtuously and honorably, but is unsuccessful. A student acting on strength of will succeeds in the making the moral decision through great effort. The elephant wants the reins, but the rider is eventually successful in the effort. When students are able to make the moral decision without great effort, then they have arrived at Aristotle’s level of “character excellence.”

Students who aspire to strength of will and character excellence can call upon their character strengths to support them in making wise decisions. Knowing what particular traits look like when they come alive can be instructive. Nansoon Park and Chris Peterson, leading researchers in character strengths in youth, claim that “being able to put a name to what one does well is intriguing and even empowering.” Each student has a unique set of higher (often called “signature”) strength combinations that, in concert, are uniquely valuable to

his or her thoughts, feelings, and behavior. This set may include strengths such as creativity, persistence, integrity, vitality, fairness, humility, and gratitude.

At Culver Academy, all students complete the Values in Action-Youth inventory, a 198-item psychometrically validated test that identifies strengths of character. The VIA identifies 24 ubiquitous character strengths, each fitting into one of six categories. By knowing, valuing, and acting on their own strengths, students are more attentive to performance traits such as diligence, perseverance, and self-discipline, and to how they co-mingle with the relational strengths of integrity, justice, caring, and respect. Imagine students having a list of the 24 best things about themselves! Imagine further that by learning about these strengths, they can better engage others by appealing to their strengths.

With a tool box of strengths, student leaders can ask themselves the following questions:

- What are my strengths? How do I know they are my strengths?
- How often and under what circumstances do I get to exercise my strengths?
- How can I increase opportunities to use and develop these strengths in working with other students?
- What are my most powerful strength combinations?
- How can I use these “teams” of strengths to develop my leadership skills?

By learning about character strengths and ways to build and apply them, student leaders can be guided to acknowledge, own, and apply their own strengths for themselves and others. ✨

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**LEAD ARTICLE  
CONTINUED FROM P. 2**

expulsions, and dropouts, while increasing student knowledge and demonstration of virtues such as respect, responsibility, self-discipline, tolerance, caring, and empathy. Character education initiatives contribute to a healthy and safe school environment, enhance student civic participation, contribute to a decrease in discipline problems in the classroom and school, help students reflect on their behaviors and thus make wiser life choices, and encourage more parent involvement in school events and in children's education. ✨

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*This article is excerpted and adapted, with permission, from a longer article titled "Do Character Development Programs Really Work? Moving from Foundations to Findings in a Wider (Non-military) Context," written for presentation to the International Society for Military Ethics.*

*Edward DeRoche is a professor and Director of the Character Development Center in the School of Leadership and Education Sciences at the University of San Diego. He will be the lead presenter at CSEE's fall conference focusing on assessment of character education programs.*

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**CHARACTER AWARDS  
CONTINUED FROM P. 6**

Descriptions of schools with established programs winning character education grants will be published in the September issue of *Connections*:

Wooster School (Danbury CT), \$20,000  
Tim Golding, Head of School

The Willow School (Gladstone, NJ), \$10,000  
Kate Burke Walsh, Head of School

Norwood School (Bethesda, MD), \$10,000  
Richard Ewing Jr., Head of School

For more complete details of these schools' proposals for this award, see [www.csee.org](http://www.csee.org) ✨

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## UPCOMING CONFERENCES

### JULY 2009

S	M	T	W	T	F	S
			1	2	3	4
5	6	7	8	9	10	11
12	13	14	15	16	17	18
19	20	21	22	23	24	25
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### 2009 Institute on Teaching the World's Religions

This year's focus will be on Buddhism and Islam, but with lots more, too. Get new ideas and deepen understanding with nationally recognized scholars, and share resources with world-religions teachers from independent schools across the country.

With Christian Wedemeyer, Ph.D. and Asma Afsaruddin, Ph.D.

June 25-29, 2009  
Chicago, Illinois

### 2009 Summer Adult Ethics Institute

A perennial favorite, the Adult Ethics Institute invites school teachers, administrators, and trustees to discuss meaningful pieces of fiction and nonfiction, as well as ethical case studies from real situations in independent schools. Based on the enthusiastic recommendation of participants in 2007, this year's institute will return to the relaxed natural beauty of the Whidbey Institute in Washington state's Puget Sound.

With Dan Heishman  
July 18-23, 2009  
Whidbey Island  
Clinton, Washington

### Evaluating Character Education Programs

This workshop will focus on how to assess progress in character education initiatives. One day will concentrate on evaluation, and one will highlight schools that have developed effective character education programs.

With Edward de Roche, Ph.D.  
October 23-24, 2009  
San Diego, California

### Community Service and Service Learning

With Mary Pashley  
November date TBA  
Florida

### Greening the Curriculum

Postponed from 2009, this event will focus on the two great impediments to better success in our schools' efforts to be green: the curriculum and the moral climate at school.

With Ursula Goodenough, Ph.D. and others  
January 17-19, 2010  
Miami, Florida

### Developing Student Leadership: A Symposium

Back by popular demand, this program will focus on three schools with exemplary programs to develop student leaders. Participants will grow in their understanding of how student leadership is developed, and be introduced to leadership programs in a variety of different schools.

Schools presenting:

Kent Place School (Summit, NJ)  
Summit Country Day School (Cleveland, OH)  
St. Michael's University School (Vancouver, BC)

April date TBA  
Summit, NJ

## RESEARCH SHOWS LITTLE TOLERANCE FOR ZERO TOLERANCE

*Zero Tolerance* for certain disciplinary issues became all the rage during the early 90s. Back in the last century. The idea was a good one, but implementation showed its problems. Some of us thought “one strike, you’re out” would get the elephant-driver teen brain (see the Yeager/Duckett article on p. 8) to navigate the slalom course of school life with few repercussions; the very few who let their elephant emotions steer the course would lose their rights to community life. Excluding perpetrators from the community would both teach a lesson and make the learning environment better for the rest of us, in theory.

The American Psychological Association assigned a task force to look at zero-tolerance policies and their results in schools, and the task force’s recommendations were published this past December (2008).

Though recognizing the responsibility, and need, for schools to insure safe and productive learning environments for students, the task force concluded that “the overwhelming majority of findings from the available research on zero tolerance and exclusionary discipline tend to contradict the assumptions” upon which such policies are based: zero-tolerance policies do not really benefit the students or schools where they are implemented.

The report concluded: “Although it seems intuitive that removing disruptive students from school will make schools better places for those students who remain, or that severe punishment will improve the behavior of the punished student or of those who witness the punishment, the available evidence constantly flies in the face of these beliefs.” Based on their conclusion, the task force recommended both changes in the way zero-tolerance policies are applied (in cases where they are deemed absolutely necessary) and, more importantly, that schools use more flexible and commonsense approaches to discipline in general.

This page in *Connections* has addressed discipline perhaps more often than any other topic, the reason for which being the tremendous potential disciplinary practices have for enhancing, or detracting from, a school’s moral-development objectives.

Zero-tolerance policies are easy to administer. Their two other main advantages are that rules are clear, as they should be, and that individuals detrimental to the learning atmosphere are excluded; in the latter sense the policy is beneficial.

On the other hand, a host of problems arise, most of which were addressed by the task force: sometimes our hands are tied and students who we believe do not deserve severe and automatic punishments are “caught up” in the rules. When students are excluded from school, such policies can create “increases in student alienation, anxiety, rejection, and breaking of healthy adult bonds.”

CSEE, at least in recent years, has encouraged schools not just to have a *policy* for discipline, but a *philosophy* of discipline, and to have the discipline philosophy linked as tightly as possible to the school’s moral development goals. If one of the school’s goals is to instill respect for people and property, and a student has picked a fight, and then “won” the fight with another student, for example, our task as educator-disciplinarians is to find the most appropriate way to deal with the issue such that we have shown respect, such that we have attempted to help the perpetrator of the act learn greater respect, and such that other students both see our respect and learn something new about respect for themselves. Our respect for the victim must also be shown.

Zero tolerance for moral issues like cheating, harm against others, or destruction of property is of course to be expected. But when “zero tolerance” means an automatic set of consequences regardless of the circumstances, then one part of school policy is working against a more important part of school policy. And that is not helpful. ✨

*Reference:*

*APA Zero Tolerance Task Force, December, 2008. Are Zero Tolerance Policies Effective in Schools? An evidentiary review and recommendations. American Psychologist, 252-62.*

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