

ABOUT CSEE

The Council for Spiritual and Ethical Education supports the moral and spiritual development of young people through offering resources and educational opportunities to elementary, middle, and secondary schools. See more about our work at www.csee.org

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RISK FAILURE...AND SUCCEED

BY AVRIL P. BECKFORD, M.D.

Parents confuse being an advocate for their child with negotiating for their child's success. Advocating for your child is putting his or her physical and spiritual wellbeing at the forefront of any action you might take. Negotiating for children is teaching them to be manipulative. One of the best examples of inappropriate negotiation is the story of a father with a

The father told his daughter how sorry he was about the B+ (sending the message that only As are good enough, and by apologizing, taking inappropriate ownership of her project.) He told her that he strongly disagreed with the teacher (hence undermining a positive influence in her life and losing the value of the lesson on following directions). And he told his daughter that he would go to the school and "fix things."

Ph.D. whose first grader brought home a B+ for the first time. The project had involved a title page and a main page, and because she had not followed the directions on the title page, the teacher had appropriately praised her for the project and advised that she needed to follow directions the next time. To those of us with

good common sense there are a number of issues that are all too obvious:

1. His daughter is in the first grade.
2. We learn by cause and effect. The simple but important little lesson here is to follow instructions. This will help all through schooling.
3. A B+ in the first grade is not the end of the world. It is not a hurricane or family disaster. It has no predictive value for college entry!

The father's response was tragic. He told his daughter how very sorry he was about the B+ (hence sending the

message that only As are good enough, and by apologizing, taking inappropriate ownership of her project.) He told her that he strongly disagreed with the teacher (hence undermining a wonderful positive influence in her life and losing the value of the lesson on following directions). And he told his daughter that he would go to the school and "fix things." He did, by his definition, though by mine he and his daughter suffered a tragic loss that day. He scheduled a conference with the teacher (taking her valuable time out of the classroom) and explained that the teacher had destroyed his daughter's self-esteem by giving her a B+. The teacher patiently explained the importance of this little lesson in the long term and reiterated that this was a small project in the big picture of school life. Sadly, when this irate father threatened "to take things further" the teacher buckled and agreed on a compromise: His daughter could redo the front page and the teacher would re-grade the paper an A. The tragedy of this is all too obvious. When that B was changed, the balance was lost. His little girl had just learned some very unhealthy lessons....

Amy's story was an unhappy one. A wonderful yet shy aspiring actress, she wanted to try out for the lead in the school play. Her parents, concerned that the lead would go to another, persuaded her to withdraw "to protect her from embarrassment." This had been a pattern.

Some years later, Amy is still afraid to try anything unless she is sure she will succeed. She remarked last year, "There's that song: 'if you get a chance to sit it out or dance, I hope you'll dance.' Well, I sat it out and I'll never know what it felt like to dance." She added, "Even those A+ grades I received for essays...I feel like they weren't really mine. Everything had to be perfect. Mom and Dad would proofread my homework as if the teacher was grading their grammar, not mine. I remem-

ber spending a lot of time on a drama project for my final fine arts grade that was due on a Tuesday morning. I hadn't paced myself well, and although I had completed the rough draft of the play we had to write, I hadn't left enough time to put the final copy into print on my own computer. It was after midnight and all my rough

“I wish my mom had said, ‘Amy, explain to your teacher tomorrow that you have fallen behind schedule. It might mean a lower grade, but you will have learned more about how to pace yourself. Besides, I love you just as you are and I’m proud that you tried so hard.’”

draft components were on the floor. I had a calculus test in the morning. My mother took charge (as always): ‘Amy, you have to get an A on the calculus exam tomorrow, and this drama assignment should be superb. You know you stand an excel-

lent chance of getting the fine arts prize and others, and the whole family is flying in for honors night. I don't want to be humiliated. You've done the work. I'll stay up and type the final version. You need your rest.’

“It was always about my mom and living up to her expectations and feeling that her credibility rested on my success. (Failure wasn't an option.) I remember (and always will) making a decision that I would regret. I agreed to let her do it. The grade and teacher comment were the best I'd ever had and I felt sick. When I read the play in its final form, it was perfect. Only it wasn't my work. Firstly, I didn't really complete it in a timely manner and I should have planned better. That became a pattern for me when I reached college, as there was no one to bail me out. Secondly, there were some subtle changes in the text: punctuation, spelling, etc. Mom sure did a perfect job of ‘editing and typing.’ The play was chosen to be enacted at the upper school assembly, and I wanted to hide—especially when the teacher commented that it was the ‘fine tuning’ I'd done in the final version that had made the plot even stronger. Our honor code requires that we sign a pledge to say that we

never received any help. When I accepted the fine arts prize and when I graduated, I felt a hollow pit in my stomach. I felt lonely and empty. I didn't really know who I was, and the accolade felt hollow.

“I wish my mom had said, ‘Amy, looks like you need to pace yourself better. Explain to your teacher tomorrow that you have fallen behind schedule. It might mean a lower grade, but you will have learned more about how to pace yourself. Besides, I love you just as you are and I'm proud that you tried so hard.’ I feel disconnected from my mom because I can't be vulnerable enough to fail. I always wondered if they loved me more because of my performance. My mom's obvious pleasure at my award blinded her to how I felt. Our relationship changed that day. Perhaps the only positive thing to come out of this is I'll never do that to my children, and I won't stand by as a passive accomplice in the future. I am so afraid of college. There is not much I've done on my own.”

Amy's story is tragic but poignant. It happens all the time—in school, in extracurricular activities, in life, in relationships. Allow your children to fail and grow. It is a great gift. Don't live through them. That is like placing a noose around their neck.

Take-home messages:

If your child has a chance to sit it out or dance, encourage her to dance.

Our actions model expected behavior for our children more than our words.

If we are afraid to encourage our children to risk failure, we clip their wings and prevent them from soaring. ✨

*This article includes excerpts from two chapters of Dr. Beckford's book Allow Your Children to **Fail** if You Want Them to **Succeed**, and are reprinted here with her permission. For more information on the author and the book, see “Curriculum Spotlight,” on p. 6.*

WHY THE REST HATES THE WEST: UNDERSTANDING THE ROOTS OF GLOBAL RAGE

Meic Pearse

DOWNERS GROVE, IL: INTERVARSITY PRESS, 2004

BY RICHARD BARBIERI

Robert Burns still said it best: “Oh wad some power the giftie gie us/To see oursel’s as others see us!” Meic Pearse’s book appears to offer us such an opportunity to get beyond the incomprehension, stereotyping, and reactive hostility that are the West’s most common response to the realization, catalyzed by 9/11, how much we are indeed hated in many quarters.

Pearse, a student of history and philosophy, including church history, and a lay church leader, contends that the rest hate us because we are quite hateful. Early on he asserts that “the primary cause of most present conflicts in which the West is now engaged is neither religion nor foreign policy, but culture...to the non-West our culture appears not as a culture at all, but as an anticulture.” It soon becomes clear that Pearse himself agrees with that assessment. Here is his own view of the state of the West (by which he means not only or even principally the U.S., but all of Western Europe and pretty much all Western-style democracies): “only an abundance of riches such as no previous generation has known could possibly console us for the emptiness of our lives, the absence of stable families and relationships, and the lack of any overarching purpose.”

At this point the reader might question from what direction Pearse is attacking the West: for its materialism, as a leftist might, or for its secularism, from the right. But such labels do not capture the extent of Pearse’s condemnation. For he rejects not only the excesses of our culture, but many of its very foundations. Openness, for example, “is not a value but an antivalue.” Our belief in human rights he dismisses as “essentially an invention of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment” and “a concept foreign to Scripture”—a contention worthy of quite a few pages of rebuttal, some readers of Scripture might contend. Indeed the rot has been

around for a long time: Jonathan Edwards, for example, was in Pearse’s eyes far too optimistic about the perfectibility of human nature.

Pearse’s maintains that all societies before ours recognized values of obedience, conformity, personal obligation, and duty, usually supported by a transcendent religious vision, and were therefore inherently superior to our modern shallow and permissive ways. The one hope he sees is that the hugely higher birthrates of these societies will relatively soon overwhelm Western societies and make “the anticulture with its antivalues...nothing but a bad memory.”

One pictures the Washington Mall in 2103, the statues of Lincoln and Jefferson being tumbled like Saddam’s, surrounded by a crowd oddly similar to the one in Baghdad 2003.

Curiously, Pearse almost never cites a non-Western voice, but derives his views from his own reading of history and those of a few vehemently Western historians, such as Harvard’s Samuel P. Huntington and the late Allan Bloom. The result is indeed a book that helps us see ourselves from a new perspective, but one so eccentric that it is more like a view from another planet than from the other side of the globe. ✨

The result is indeed a book that helps us see ourselves from a new perspective, but one so eccentric that it is more like a view from another planet than from the other side of the globe.

Richard Barbieri, CSEE’s veteran book reviewer, is Interim Head of School at Stone Ridge School of the Sacred Heart in Bethesda, Maryland.

HELPING STUDENTS COPE WITH LOSS *by Juliane Stevens and David Streight*

The National Public Radio program “Talk of the Nation” did a piece this past fall that continues to come back to mind when we hear about loss or grief in schools. The segment featured a high school student, Emily Mason. As a middle schooler in September of 2001, Emily taped interviews with her classmates within days of the collapse of the Twin Towers. The perspective she is now able to offer should be of interest to educators, perhaps especially those of us who have regular contact with verbally facile young people in independent schools.

According to the report: “Listening to their thoughts from that day, the participants say they realize that they weren’t talking about their feelings, but rather about the facts as they understood them. In fact, many of those who took part now laugh at themselves for sounding like little experts—and say they did that to hide the fact that they were scared.”

When dealing with grief, loss, or trauma, our articulate, well-informed students may sound very “in control,” much as these young people did describing their responses to the terrorist attack and the resulting loss of life. Despite their measured, thoughtful commentary, these students recall feeling uncertain and fearful. Further, they remember their cogent remarks into the tape recorder as attempts to hide their fear.

With smaller classes, close teacher-student relationships, and ample opportunity for authentic discussion, independent schools are well-equipped to meet students’ emotional and psychological needs, especially in times when disaster upends their normally stable, predictable lives. On rare occasions disasters are public and monumental, but much more often they involve loss of a loved one to illness or accident.

Here are four tips offered by the National Association of School Psychologists for helping support students who have experienced the loss of a friend or loved one:

- Be a good listener; give students the opportunity to tell their story and share their grief. Let students’ questions guide you in providing information and clarification.
- Be honest with children about the facts surrounding a tragic event; at the same time gauge the way information is shared to students’ developmental level. Lies and half-truths do not help young people develop strategies to face future challenges. Students deserve accuracy from adults when speaking of loss and death, and recognition that these are natural parts of the cycle of life.
- Be active in letting students know that you really want to understand what they are feeling and what they need. This can be done by giving them time and encouragement, or via planned activities that help them sort out their emotions in response to loss or grief.
- Be aware that grief is difficult, complicated, draining, and a process that varies considerably from individual to individual. Be willing to accommodate a student’s needs; be flexible in your expectations.

One of the positives of “being there” for someone’s grief is that it is a powerful glue for human relationships. And among all the other findings regarding “what works” in character education and moral development, the most foundational component ends up being—to borrow three words from CSEE Moral Development Advisory Board member Marvin Berkowitz—“relationships, relationships, relationships.” ❄

Juliane Stevens is a CSEE Trustee and member of CSEE’s Moral Development Team. David Streight is Executive Director. Both are trained as school psychologists, and have presented together on the topic of dealing with grief at school.

SPIRITUAL SCHOOLS PITCH RUBBER TENTS

At the end of this past summer, I had the pleasure of attending the wedding of my best friend. Without lacking intimacy and charm, it was nonetheless the most luxurious nuptial I have ever attended. The outdoor ceremony was on an historic piece of family-owned property on a mountaintop estate in the Blue Ridge Mountains of southern Virginia. In the shadow of a towering castle built with stones imported from Scotland a hundred years ago, two hundred people witnessed the exchange of vows in a rose garden ceremony, and then followed the bagpipes across the manicured lawns to take our seats under a small sky of a white tent. I found my name on one of the seating charts and then tried to find the table number to match my name in a process reminiscent of playing hours of Battleship as a child. Finally, I made my way to table number ten. I did not know anyone at my table, proof that this was one of “those weddings” where the bride and groom have decided to break up the guests in hopes of spreading the miracle of sacramental unity by making friends of every stranger invited.

But just as my table began the awkward custody questions of weddings in that familiar “Whose are you, bride or groom?” name game, I looked up at the sky and saw a dark rain cloud coming over the mountain. And then it occurred to me that the only reason I could see this cloud was because our table was about four feet outside the massive tent. I looked around to see that ours was the only table of fifty outside the protective reach of the massive covering. I was not the only one at our table to fix on the dark cloud as we took our seats. I tried to break the ice as we sat down by making a joke about our situation. “Well,” I said into the silence, “it appears we all have at least one thing in common: we were all invited to the wedding, but not invited to the tent.” In the wake of my unappreciated joke, you could hear the rumble of thunder in the distance and the sound of no one laughing at table #10.

None of the guests under the tent even noticed the cloud or the periodic raindrops that fell on the top of their tent and on the top of our heads at table ten. But

of course not, because the purpose of a tent is to relieve guests of that kind of fear. Throughout the night, as the clouds came and went, we all made jokes about our options at the diaspora table. One man from Vermont suggested that we should pick up our name cards and switch them with those of people under the tent before all had taken seats. But of course, that would mean that someone in the tent would be pushed out, and maybe it would be someone we knew and loved, someone sick or someone less humorous about being left out. A therapist from Utah joked that we could just go sit down under the tent and pretend to be someone else—but that would also mean that some innocent person would be without a worry-free seat as a result of our deception.

We ultimately decided to look on the bright side, see our fate as a sign of our fortitude, and brave the rain together and in good humor. In all honesty, the wedding was by no means ruined for our table. There were short sprinkles throughout the joyous evening, just enough to worry us on and off, but

not enough to destroy the wedding joy. We all just tried to ignore the fickle trickles and get to know one another. No doubt we were distracted by the ever-present fear of being soaked, but we accepted that possibility and blamed the tent pitchers, not the newlyweds.

Throughout that beautiful night, I thought more than once about tents and schools. In independent schools, we inherit and continue to construct amazing physical spaces. And to mark time and rites of passage, we decorate our events, establish well-endowed programs of all kinds, and yes, some of us hold very luxurious ceremonies. Linen and

Spiritual leaders in school are the tent pitchers. When we see the expanse of our school communities, when we intentionally ask and listen to the voices of minorities of all kinds, we let the margins tell us where to stake the tent. And every day, we need to listen harder and be ready to stretch the tent. To include everyone in the mission, we need to ask everyone to help pitch the tent.

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CSEE CURRICULUM SPOTLIGHT

Allow Your Children to Fail if You Want Them to Succeed

by Avril Beckford, M.D.

Pediatrician Avril Beckford is uniquely situated for addressing parents and teachers about issues facing parents of students in the nation's finest independent schools. As a medical doctor with two professional decades under her stethoscope—treating children and interacting with their parents—she sees both healthy children and those with virus-related, microbe-related, and occasionally culture-of-privilege-related illnesses.

As the mother of two independent-school children, a trustee of a top-tier independent school, and a CSEE Trustee as well, Dr. Beckford understands schools and what happens in and around them.

Allow Your Children to Fail if You Want Them to Succeed is 70 quite readable pages of illustrations and practical suggestions for both parents and the school staff members who interact with them. The book's lessons apply to all, but Dr. Beckford's focus makes it especially relevant for relatively well-to-do parents who have both high expectations for their children and a tendency to intervene to rescue children encountering difficulties (the Bubble Wrap Syndrome).

The many practical, bare-bones suggestions to be found in *Allow Your Children to Fail if You Want Them to Succeed* make it a great resource for parents and teachers, and especially for teachers with lots of parent contact (not to forget teachers who are also parents). ✨

Member school price: \$10 (\$9 each for orders of 10 or more copies)

Non-member price: N/A. This book is available through the Web sites of major booksellers for \$12.95.

IN THE WEB

<http://www.csee.org/resources/film.html>

Csee is often approached by educators who wish to expand their religious curricula by showing films that illustrate religious traditions and ethics lessons. Films serve as useful teaching tools in the classroom, as they bring the material and lessons to life in an exciting fashion for students. Sandra Switzer of the Lovett School in Atlanta, Georgia, with the assistance of members from CSEE's national resource panel on the teaching of religion, has compiled a list of films for possible use in the religion or ethics classroom. The list is now available on the CSEE Web site.

The films are categorized by religious tradition; there is a line of description about each one, and in some cases a note is made about appropriate age level for viewing. From Hollywood blockbusters to lesser-known documentaries, the Film Resource Page on the CSEE Web site reads as an extensive film library for those wishing to further their knowledge of religious traditions. Moreover, Switzer is thorough in providing film titles relevant to a wide variety of religions and geographical areas as she represents the major world religions, as well as indigenous traditions and smaller sects.

The Film Resource Page on the CSEE Web site is a useful tool for educators, students, and parents alike who wish to expand their knowledge of religious themes by way of film and media. ✨

CSEE NEWS

Now on the CSEE Web site, at www.csee.org/connections/rtu107: the first edition of Religion Teacher Update, a five-page PDF newsletter for middle school and high school teachers of religion. Readers who did not receive an email notice of RTU's appearance can ensure that they will be notified of the second issue by sending a message (just say "subscribe") to <worldrel@csee.org>. ✨

RELIGIOUS HOLIDAYS & OBSERVANCES

APRIL 2007

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See additional details, including holy days for early March, at www.csee.org



March 25 Feast of the Annunciation of the Virgin Mary (Christianity)

In ancient times it was believed that God's incarnation must have coincided with the creation of the world (which naturally was springtime), and so the feast of "God becoming man" was set to take place just as spring was beginning. This incarnation occurred when the angel Gabriel announced to the virgin Mary that she was going to bear a child, Jesus. (Thus, his birth at Christmas, nine months later.) The feast is celebrated with prayers and attendance at church services.

March 26 Khordad Sal (Zoroastrianism)

This is the anniversary of the birth of the prophet Zarathustra (also called Zoroaster), celebrated the sixth day of the Parsi month Farvardin, with prayers offered in temples. Many ancient events in Persian history are said to have happened on this day. It is celebrated by families coming together, but also presents an opportunity for Zoroastrians to review the way they are living their lives and think about how they can improve. Children often wear new clothing; flowers and delicious food are seen in homes.

March 27 Ramanavani (Hinduism)

This day celebrates the birth of the Hindu god Rama, who is best known through the great Hindu epic titled the *Ramayana*. In some parts of India, there is a nine-day festival leading up to the Ramanavani. Devout Hindu devotees of Rama commemorate the day with ablutions in the morning, and then by chanting mantras from the Vedas. Offerings of flowers and fruit are made to the god. A fast is kept during the day, and followed by breaking it with a celebration that night.

April 1 Palm Sunday (Christianity)

The last Sunday before Easter is referred to as Palm Sunday, the day that inaugurates Holy Week. Palm Sunday commemorates Jesus' procession into Jerusalem, riding on a donkey. Many contemporary Christians decorate their churches with palm branches, in remembrance of worshippers placing palm branches along his route.

April 2 Hanuman Jayanti (Hinduism)

This celebration commemorates the birth of Hanuman, the monkey god widely venerated throughout India. It is celebrated during the month of Chaitra. Hanuman was an ardent devotee of Lord Rama, and is worshipped for his unflinching devotion to the god. From the early morning, devotees flock to Hanuman temples to worship the monkey god. The devotees will visit temples and apply tilak of sindhoor to their foreheads as this is considered to be good luck. According to the legend, Sita was applying sindhoor to her head, Hanuman Ji questioned why, and she replied that this would ensure a long life for her husband. Hanuman then smeared his entire body with sindhoor, in an effort to ensure Rama's immortality.

April 3 (to 10) Pesach (Judaism)

Pesach is the Hebrew word for Passover; it commemorates the liberation from slavery of the Israelites in Egypt around 2000 B.C.E. It is frequently observed by families and friends gathering together to celebrate. The first and last days of the celebration are often considered days when most kinds of work should not be done.

April 5

Maundy Thursday (Christianity)

The Thursday of Holy Week that commemorates Jesus' Last Supper with the disciples. The word Maundy derives from the Latin *mandatum* or commandment, referring to Jesus' command to his disciples to love one another (see John 13). Many churches offer an evening liturgy that includes Holy Communion. In some churches, the ranking official washes the feet of twelve people, recalling Jesus' washing of the disciples' feet.

April 6

Good Friday (Christianity)

This is the most solemn day in the Christian year, as it recalls Jesus' suffering and death (his Passion) on the cross. The day always falls on the Friday of Holy Week. The title of "Good" Friday may refer to the salvation offered to humanity as a result of Jesus' sacrificial death; others believe the etymology is from "God's Friday." Worship services often last three hours, mimicking the traditional time that Jesus suffered on the cross.

April 7

Holy Saturday (Christianity)

Holy Saturday is the day before Easter in the Christian calendar. In Roman Catholic churches, the altar is stripped completely bare in memory of the loss of Christ. It has always been a day of severity in Christianity. At midnight the forty days of Lent come to a close with the midnight mass that celebrates Easter.

April 8

Easter (Christianity)

This is the day in the Christian calendar that celebrates the resurrection of Jesus from the death he suffered on the cross three days earlier. It is considered the highest celebration in the Christian church, and is usually marked by attendance at important religious ceremonies, with songs of praise and rejoicing. In many churches, it opens with the blessing of fire at midnight; the fire is symbolic of the light of Christ. Children often get new clothing for Easter; the eggs of Easter symbolize the new life that Christians receive by the death and resurrection of Jesus.

April 14

Baisakhi Day (Sikhism)

Baisakhi (which means "springtime") is the harvest festival for Sikhs, but it is best known in that it commemorates the foundation of the Khalsa, the Sikh order. After a period of intense persecution of religions, and the martyrdom of the ninth Sikh leader, his follower called people together for what he promised to be a special celebration of Baisakhi. He asked for one brave man to enter his tent. A short time later he came back out with his sword dripping with blood. He asked for a second volunteer, and the same thing happened. After the fifth, he came out with all five volunteers, to an astonished crowd, and praised these brave men. Thus was the foundation of what was called the Panth Khalsa, which means the "Order of the Pure Ones." It is celebrated in India with dances, song, fancy clothing, and traditional jewelry.

April 15

Yom Hashoah (Judaism)

There are various beliefs about what is and is not appropriate on this day, and many of them are conflicting. In general, Yom Hashoah has been observed with candle-lighting, speakers, poems, prayers, and singing. Often, six candles are lighted to represent the six million Holocaust survivors. Survivors speak about their experiences or share in the readings. Some ceremonies have people read from the Book of Names for certain lengths of time in an effort to remember those that died and to give an understanding of the huge number of victims. Sometimes these ceremonies are held in a cemetery or near a Holocaust memorial.

April 21

Ridvan (Baha'i)

In Arabic, the word *ridvan* means "good pleasure," and it also refers to Paradise. It indicates specifically the name of a beautiful garden in Baghdad where the Baha'i founder, Baha'u'llah, was living. Ridvan commemorates Baha'u'llah's public announcement that he had been called to be a prophet. The full festival lasts twelve days; Baha'is tend to take holidays on the first, ninth, and last days of Ridvan. ❁

fine food and bagpipes are not foreign to the pageantry of our communities, or even to the daily life of our institutions. In classes, in performances, in competitions, and in rituals of all kinds, we demonstrate intentional sculpting and showing of our abundance.

But the question for the school seeking spiritual health beyond mere material castle decorating is this: is there anyone we've invited into the school community, but not invited to take a seat under the tent of our inclusion and affirmation? Are there students, parents, alumni, faculty or staff members who are trying their best to accept their fate in places of fear rather than fight their alma mater as ignored or silenced people? Are we making time in the classroom, the faculty room, and the boardroom to listen—really listen—to the marginal people in our schools, the folks who so often are trying to look on the bright side and see their challenges as a chance for their own growth, rather than declaring that their unsafety is, instead, a clarion call for the institution to grow?

The silent guests at our feasts, especially students, want so much to be present and to be a part of the life of the school that many are not going to make demands about being included in all aspects of the school. Spiritual leaders need to speak for them in their silence, and with them when they do speak out. Every school has a different group of people outside the tent: some because of race, some because of socio-economic status, some because of sexual orientation, some because of language or cultural barriers, others because of physical disabilities. My experience outside the tent was that I was distracted, periodically, from talking and learning and growing and sharing with the folks at my table.

And that is exactly what happens to those in our schools who feel unwelcome or unsafe. Large portions of their energy and creativity are wasted on thoughts about personal safety and survival. We are losing the gifts and the talents of those outside the tent as they labor to protect themselves, while the safe are dancing

and feasting on their privilege. I know that in my own classroom, I try to send every possible message that I want every child—and every part of every child—to feel safe in my presence. One effective practice I have is to invite every student, no matter what the course, to burn me a CD of his or her favorite music that relates to the themes of the course. I used to give extra credit for this gift, but I found that, credit or not, students always jump to the invitation. This is just one way of inviting the hopes, fears, dreams, and loyalties of the whole child into a curious, respectful, and safe learning space.

The reality of tents is that they are made by human beings and are therefore as limited in reach as the minds that envision them. Tents are beautiful and inspiring because they represent our desire to protect and preserve human flourishing. But we cannot let unexamined loyalty to notions of “tradition” turn our schools’ tents of inclusion into stone ceilings of static and stoic unsafety.

Spiritual leaders in school are, if anything, the tent pitchers. We are the people who consider events before they happen and start asking questions early about how to ensure that every single person experiences the spiritual goals of our school missions. When we see the expanse of our school communities, when we intentionally ask and listen to the voices of minorities of all kinds, we let the margins tell us where to stake the tent. And every day, we need to listen harder and be ready to stretch the tent. To include everyone in the mission, we need to ask everyone to help pitch the tent. Some traditions in our school will break if they are stretched too far. So let them. The borders of our love cannot be fixed. Tents that are not rubber are stone, and no one can see light under rock. ✨

Patricia Lyons teaches Religion and Ethics at St. Stephen's and St. Agnes School in Alexandria, Virginia

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UPCOMING CONFERENCES

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Advisors and Advisory Systems

With Barb Dixon Ackerman and LouAnne Smith
Greenhill School
Addison (Dallas), Texas
March 30-31, 2007

Resources for Spiritual Development

(For chaplains, religion teachers, spiritual directors, all grades)
With Thomas Coburn, Ph.D, and colleagues at
Naropa Institute
Boulder, Colorado
April 16-17, 2007

Community Service/Service Learning

With Mary Pashley and Ann Saylor
Washington, D.C.
April 21-22, 2007

MAY 2007

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How We Become Moral, and Activities for Moral Growth

(For school staff, grades K-12)
With Michael Schulman, Ph.D.
The Garrison Institute, New York, NY
April 21-22, 2007

Emerging Best Practices: A Character Development Symposium

(Sponsored by a CSEE member school)
With Peter Bachmann, Elizabeth Corrie, Ph.D.,
and David Streight
Kinkaid School, Houston, Texas
June 7-8, 2007

JUNE 2007

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2007 Institute on Teaching the World's Religions

(For teachers of world religions and history.)
San Francisco, California
With Jeffrey Brodd, Ph.D., Martin VerHoeven, Ph.D.,
Linda Hess, Ph.D.
June 23-27, 2007

JULY 2007

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Summer Ethics Institute for Adults

(For school administrators, trustees, and staff: discussion of significant pieces of literature and ethical cases that have faced independent schools—all in a beautiful and relaxed setting)
With Daniel Heischman and Sharon Daloz Parks
Whidbey Island, Washington, in the Puget Sound
July 14-20, 2007 ✨

SIGN UP FOR PDF NEWSLETTERS

Community Service Coordinators and Advisory Coordinators should be aware of CSEE's PDF newsletters for their areas of interest, available on the Web at www.csee.org/connections/AQ1206, for advisors, and www.csee.org/connections/SQ1206, for community service coordinators. ✨

SUMMER OPPORTUNITY FOR STUDENTS

Youth Theological Initiative is a three-week ecumenical experience. YTI's overall goal is fostering theological reflection among adolescents. Through YTI's Summer Academy, under the guidance of a staff largely from the Candler School of Theology at Emory University, students learn to become "public theologians," bringing faith to action in the tradition of Dorothy Day, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Bernice Johnson Reagon. Participants also serve the city of Atlanta through collaboration with local service agencies. Although YTI's focus is intentionally and ecumenically Christian, students from all faiths are invited to participate. The cost for the Summer Academy is \$500, which covers room, board, books, and travel around Atlanta. Students are responsible for their own travel to and from Atlanta. Some scholarship assistance is available. More information is available at <http://www.candler.emory.edu/YTI>, or at 404.712.9160. ✨

WORKING WITH PARENTS

All the research tells us that home is where it's at for moral foundations. So why character initiatives at school? Because schools are the strong secondary force; and as we know, some families are better equipped than others for the character building kids need. Research on character initiatives at school nevertheless tells us that the more we involve parents, the more successful we will be. Here are three possible ways to improve the quality and effectiveness of the work we are all here to do.

Work for partnership, rather than communication

For many schools, involving parents in moral development initiatives means keeping them informed of what we are doing. Informing parents of our activities is a good thing. Involving parents in the process of character formation is far more effective. Effectiveness should be our goal. Some parents have lots to offer us, as mentors, as speakers, as models, as resources...

Educate parents

"Education" does not need to mean designing classes for parents, although in some cases classes are excellent initiatives. Whether such formal ventures are tried or not (and often, we know, the parents who attend are those who need the classes least) our education of parents can and should take other tacks. Here are four possibilities; tell parents that the same four are being worked on at school, and partnership will lead to maximum results.

1. Define important values to work on in the next two or three years

Have parents make their own lists of what aspects of moral/ethical development they want to emphasize with their children. Picking three or four items of focus from a list will not be interpreted by children that others are not important. If the list is long, values can then be ranked as 1) absolutely necessary, 2) greatly desired, or 3) important but other values are more important. For example, a clean room and groomed hair are perhaps important or greatly desired, but on the relative scale for many of us, they would take a second seat to kindness to a younger brother or disrespectful language to parents.

2. Negotiate, and teach negotiation

Help parents to understand the usefulness of teaching children interpersonal negotiation skills—and to do so by practicing these skills with their children. Some issues should be

non-negotiable, but negotiating on certain others is not being a wishy-washy parent. On the contrary, it helps our children learn valuable skills for conflict resolution and problem solving. As a side benefit, the right kind of negotiation with children can purchase a modicum of mental peace for parents.

3. Set high moral goals and demand maturity in working toward them

Parents who set high expectations for their children and communicate these expectations clearly have a far greater chance of seeing their children be friendly rather than hostile to their peers, cooperative rather than resistive with adults, and facilitating the work of their peers rather than being interested in disrupting it.

4. Use discipline to develop sensitive, caring children

The right kind of discipline fosters empathy in children. When we confront our children about actions that are harmful to others, if we do so by pointing out the harm or possible harm of the actions on the other, and suggest reparation in some way, we thus further the possibilities for both empathy and socially sensitive conduct in our children as they grow older. If "natural consequences" or "you know the rules/end of discussion" is not accompanied by a focus on our actions' effects on others, we lose the power of a teachable moment.

Be cognizant of the value of parent partnerships

A third general recommendation to maximize the power of school partnerships with parents entails reminding school employees of this power. Some of us benefit from occasional reminders of the important roles that parents play. Yes, it does take a little more work to involve parents. Yes, some are more amenable to partnerships than others. But the results are clear. And the results are worth it if we want our students to develop moral and ethical foundations.

Schools with successful programs for moral development end up with fewer discipline problems, a safer climate, and students with more psychological and emotional energy available for concentration on academics. Academic quality improves when we address the social and emotional lives of our children appropriately. The benefits are well worth the little extra effort. ✨

David Streight