

By Dr. Kevin Ryan

The How of Character Education

The formation of good character has been an essential part of schooling in America since Colonial times. Our Founding Fathers were great proponents of education because they knew that if their “experiment with democracy” were to survive, this new country needed a virtuous citizenry. The new nation needed schools, not just for literacy and numeracy, but to acquire the moral virtues necessary for a democratic citizenry: among them self-control, consideration of others, perseverance, and a sense of right and wrong.

There is also the fact that, for good or ill, character education is inevitable. Schools are moral cauldrons immersed with issues of behaving or not behaving, gossiping or not gossiping, cooperating or not cooperating, being a friend or an enemy. Children and teens are in a malleable stage where their habits and dispositions are being formed. Character education is going to happen. It is the responsibility of educators to do it well.

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Over the last thirty years, there has been a rise and fall of character education programs based on these often competing theories and their promises of real-world results, programs such as values clarification, self-esteem, behavior modification, cognitive moral education, positive psychology, social and emotional education, and several others. Rarely, however, do the modern advocates reveal up front their conception of character and *how* teachers can actually promote good character.

The Six Es of Character Education

Six classroom elements appear to be effective in bringing about that positive change in students' characters. They are represented by six words—six Ewords: example, explanation, exhortation, ethos, experience, and engagement.

Example

As opposed to the other animals on our planet, humans come into existence with very few habits. We watch and we imitate. And so do our students. One of the built-in burdens of being a teacher is that one is always on display to our students. If we are harsh in responding to a student, they learn from that. If we gossip about another teacher, it is noted. If we do our work conscientiously or carelessly, they take that in. But then there is the curriculum. One of the major reasons behind the language arts and history curricula is to present models of good and bad example, to see virtue and vice in action and their

consequences. The task of the teacher is not to merely “cover the material” but to engage the students with the moral or immoral issues that reside in the text.

Explanation

To enhance student understanding of the human condition and our history, teachers need to offer explanations. Students need to understand the meanings of virtues and vices but especially how to acquire virtues and eliminate vices. For instance, friendship is a virtue and for many students the failure to make friends is enormously painful. Then, there is the ever-exhausting but necessary task of explaining “the rules”: why students must raise their hands before being called on; why they can't run in the halls; why cheating is forbidden; why sexting is so destructive. Nevertheless, teaching and reteaching such seemingly simple rules provide the necessary social glue of a good society.

Exhortation

Although students have human reason, it often functions poorly. An unruly and disorganized student is unmoved by a teacher's careful explanation of how he can pull himself together and get back on track. However, the teacher's exhortation or appeal to his “better angels” often can move him out of his rut. It has been said that “A mediocre teacher tells, a good teacher explains, a superior teacher demonstrates but a great teacher inspires.” Inspiration is

an important key to moral growth. Particularly with the young, inspiration wins where “sweet reason” is all too often a total failure.

Ethos

Schools vary enormously in their ethical environment or ethos. Some schools radiate warmth and caring. Others are permeated with antagonism. In some, students are busy and task oriented. In others, the opposite is true, with students demonstrating their creativity in work avoidance or picking on another student. In some, cheating is the norm. In others, it is a rare and scandalous event. These environments just don't happen. They are created and the positive ethos affect the characters of their students. These environments are typically the result of the conscious decisions and long and hard efforts of school professionals, from administrators to cafeteria help.

Expectations of Excellence

Recent studies show most students can do more, and they *want* to be challenged. It is a common experience to hear college students and adults talking about their experiences in elementary and high school and praising the teachers who won't accept work that didn't represent their best. At the time, they may not have liked or loved that teacher, but now they cherish his or her memory. These teachers contributed to their characters by establishing the habit of doing their best work, the habit of reaching for excellence.

Engagement

For true character formation, students must embrace their own transformation. To make a sustaining and positive change, students need to fall in love with a different version of themselves. This is the initial and necessary step. Teachers must convince students that only they are capable of making the necessary change. Real character education, then, is convincing students that virtues, the acquisition of good habits, is the true road to human happiness and a flourishing life. ■



Dr. Kevin Ryan is the founder and director of emeritus of Boston University's Center for Character and Social Responsibility. He is also a distinguished member of the Association of American Educators Advisory Board.



The traditional focus on students' virtues and vices, once a staple of American schools, has given way in recent years to more trendy terms and the plethora of social science constructs that have blurred the understanding of the word "character."

There are many competing definitions of character. My dictionary offers, "The complex of mental and ethical traits and markings often individualizing a person, group or nation." Another definition states that our character is the sum total of our unique cluster of virtues and vices. In the 6th Century B.C., Confucius appears to have captured both the meaning and the process of character education in a short poem:

Sow a thought. Reap an action.
Sow an action. Reap a habit.
Sow a habit. Reap a character.
Sow a character. Reap a destiny.

The key words in this poem are "sow" and "habit." Teachers are sowers: sowers of ideas, information, skills, and attitudes. Character, classically understood, is about habits, our dispositions to act in certain ways and our actual behavior. Our characters, then, consist of our habits, that is, our virtues and our vices.

AAE Welcomes New Advisory Board Members

AAE is excited to officially announce that we've added ten new AAE advisory board members to our growing team of educating professionals. Comprised of award-winning teachers and advocates from across the country, these field experts have proven themselves excellent candidates to help shape the direction of AAE. Our board members provide advice and perspective to the AAE staff, contribute ideas and recommendations on education policy, and serve as representatives to the broader teaching community.

Please join us in welcoming these esteemed professionals to our ranks!

Virginia Walden Ford

A native of Little Rock, Arkansas, Virginia Walden Ford was raised by trailblazing public school educators. Ford founded DC Parents for School Choice (1998–2011) as a clearinghouse organization for parents. Virginia is a founding member of The Black Alliance for Educational Options, Inc. She also served on the D.C. Advisory Committee of the U.S. Civil Rights Commission, The Education Breakthrough Network, and the Booker T. Washington Public Charter School in Washington, D.C. She currently serves on the boards of The Milton and Rose D. Friedman Foundation and the Arkansas Connection Academy.



Dr. Jay P. Greene

Dr. Jay P. Greene is a distinguished professor and head of the Department of Education Reform at the University of Arkansas. Greene's current areas of research interest include school choice, culturally enriching field trips, and the effect of schools on noncognitive and civic values. His research was cited four times in the Supreme Court's opinions in the landmark *Zelman v. Simmons-Harris* case on school vouchers.



Robert Haag

Robert Haag has been a leader and active participant in the Florida charter school movement since 1997. He is a co-founder and superintendent of the Charter Schools of Excellence. The Charter Schools of Excellence Fort Lauderdale Campus is one of the first urban charter schools established in Broward County and one of the first Florida charter schools to receive accreditation from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS). The Charter Schools of Excellence has grown from one campus to four, serving over 1,250 students in Broward County.



Dr. Karen Kay Harvey

Dr. Karen Kay Harvey has been involved in education for forty years and has served in all educational capacities. Dr. Harvey was an elementary teacher for fourteen years, an elementary principal for eight years, served in various capacities at the central office level for eleven years, New Mexico NAEP coordinator, New Mexico Public Education Department assessment specialist, and performed the duties of the assistant secretary for Quality Assurance and Systems Integration at the New Mexico Public Education Department. During these years in education, Dr. Harvey has worked in Colorado, Maryland, New Mexico, Canada, Washington, and Nevada. She has worked in three districts as the leader of curriculum and instruction.



Dr. Frederick M. Hess

An educator, political scientist, and author, Dr. Frederick M. Hess studies K-12 and higher education issues. His books include *The Cage-Busting Teacher*, *Cage-Busting Leadership*, *The Same Thing Over and Over*, *Education Unbound*, and *Common Sense School Reform*. He is also the author of the popular Education Week blog, *Rick Hess Straight Up*, and is a regular contributor to *The Hill*. Hess's work has



appeared in outlets such as *U.S. News & World Report*, *National Affairs*, *USA Today*, the *Washington Post*, the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, among others.

Dr. William Hughes

Dr. William H. Hughes has worked in education for thirty-five years as a teacher, principal, superintendent of schools, and director of leadership development. For sixteen years, Hughes led the Greendale School District to recognition as one of the highest performing school districts in Southeast Wisconsin. He is a former board member of the Milwaukee Area Technical College and a member of the National School Climate Council.



Lance Izumi, J.D.

Lance Izumi is Koret senior fellow and senior director of Education Studies at the Pacific Research Institute, a public policy think tank based in San Francisco and Sacramento. From 2004 to 2015, Izumi served as a member of the Board of Governors of the California Community Colleges, the largest system of higher education in the nation, and served two terms as president of the board from 2008 to 2009.



Lisa Graham Keegan

Lisa Graham Keegan is the principal partner at the Keegan Company, where she leads numerous projects, writes, and speaks on critical issues and emerging excellence in American education. She is a sought-after education reform expert who has worked with national education leaders, the media, U.S. Congress, state legislative bodies, business groups, policy organizations, community groups, and the education industry, and she currently serves as a senior advisor to National School Choice Week, an annual public awareness campaign to advance excellent choices in education.



Michael Petrilli

Mike Petrilli is president of the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institution, and executive editor of *Education Next*. An award-winning writer, he is the author of *The Diverse Schools Dilemma*, and editor of *Education for Upward Mobility*. Petrilli has published opinion pieces in the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, the *Wall Street Journal*, *Bloomberg View*, and *Slate*, and appears frequently on television and radio.



Nicholas Simmons

Nicholas Simmons is a middle school vice principal at Success Academy Charter Schools in New York City. Before becoming vice principal, Nicholas taught 7th grade math for three years at a Success Academy Middle School in Harlem. In his three years of teaching, Nicholas' 7th-grade math classes ranked as the ninth, fifth, and fourth highest performing classes in the state of New York, respectively. His editorials have been published in the *Wall Street Journal* and the *Huffington Post*, and he has appeared on national television to spread the word about education reform.



Executive Vice President Colin Sharkey welcomes the new members of the AAE Advisory Board to the inaugural meeting in Alexandria, VA.

Read the full bios and check out the full list of advisory board members, at aateachers.org/advisoryboard

No Teachers Union in Clovis

San Joaquin Valley's Fresno County can boast about more than its raisins

Clovis, a city of about 100,000 located right next to Fresno in California's fertile San Joaquin Valley, has a particular distinction: the city's schools have never been unionized. Of course, the California Teachers Association dons pretend that Clovis doesn't even exist because the district works quite well for teachers and kids without an organized labor presence. No, teachers aren't fired for "advocating for their students," aren't bound and tortured by sadistic principals, and aren't slaving away for minimum wage.

As reported in a recent piece by Joe Mathews, Clovis is the 16th largest school district in California, with 42,000 students, 49 schools, and 5,000 employees. The student body is ethnically mixed, and about half of its children are on free or reduced lunch.

Back in the 1970s, when the teacher unionization epidemic hit California, Clovis superintendent Floyd Buchanan and the city's teachers decided that they could handle the K-12 education process themselves, thus avoiding divisive union dictates and strict work rules that have infected almost all other school districts in the Golden State. While state law mandates much of what happens in school districts, including union imperatives like tenure and seniority rules, everything else is left to the local district—teacher salaries and benefits, curriculum, school calendar, student safety issues, etc.

Teachers certainly have a voice and a role in governance, though. Instead of a union, they have a Faculty Senate, in which each school has a representative. The mission of the Faculty Senate is to be "an effective advocate for teachers at all levels of policymaking, procedures, and expenditures, in partnership with our administrators, fellow employees, and community as a quality educational team."

Teacher salaries are competitive in Clovis. While starting teachers make a few thousand dollars a year more in neighboring unionized Fresno, the differences dissipate as teachers rack up more time on the job. Also, Clovis teachers pay no union dues while Fresno teachers are saddled with forced payments of \$983 a year to the Fresno Teachers Association. (For under \$200 a year, Clovis teachers can and do join the Association of American

Educators to ensure they have liability insurance and other perks of belonging to a professional association.) Also, as Faculty Senate President Duane Goudy told me in an email, "Our health benefits plan (we are self-insured) costs less and is one of the best in the state."

And students in Clovis are prospering. As reported by the *Fresno Bee* in 2014, a study by Oakland-based non-profit Education Trust-West looked at academic performance in more than 140 school districts and showed that California generally fares poorly, with most districts receiving either a C or D grade. "Of the nine districts surveyed in the central San Joaquin Valley, including Fresno, Central, Madera and Visalia Unified's, seven received a C or a D." But Clovis earned a solid A, having ranked in the top ten for four straight years. Additionally, students of color graduate at high rates and have been steadily improving on statewide tests. All this and they do it for less. As reported by Goudy, "Our district receives considerably less money per student than Fresno and eighteen other districts in our county."

The real lesson of Clovis is that good education depends not on bloated budgets, bureaucratic paper-pushers and union work rules, but rather on committed teachers and administrators who are dedicated to their students first and foremost.

Can the Clovis model be replicated? Of course. It would take a group of independent-minded teachers with moxie and tenacity to decertify their union, and thus say good-bye to the one-size-fits-all regimen of the CTA and their local affiliates. No easy task, to be sure, but certainly doable. ■

Originally published on unionwatch.org.



Larry Sand, a former classroom teacher, is the president of the nonprofit California Teachers Empowerment Network—a nonpartisan, nonpolitical group dedicated to providing teachers and the general public with reliable and balanced information about professional affiliations and positions on educational issues. The views presented here are strictly his own.

Organization Hacks That Triumph Over Classroom Clutter

TIDY UP YOUR OFFICE WITH THESE SIMPLE, EASY, INEXPENSIVE ORGANIZATION HACKS:

File folders in a dish rack

- Stack folders in plate rungs
- Store pencils and pens in the eating utensil holder



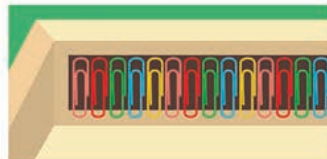
Store small supplies in a muffin tin



- Spray paint tin or keep as is
- Store in a drawer or display on a desk or work station for easy access

Organize paper clips with a magnet strip

- Glue a magnet strip inside your desk drawer
- Attach the paper clips to the strip



Keep paperwork sorted with labeled binder clips

- Print small labels on adhesive paper
- Attach to clips



Display artwork with binder clips

- Place artwork or important notes in clips
- Stand clips up on a desk or bookshelf or thread the clips onto a piece of twine to hang multiple items at once



Store markers by color in a wine rack



- Slide plastic cups into a wine rack
- Use one cup per marker color

Store supplies in jars under a table or bookshelf

- Glue or nail jar lids to the underside of desktop
- Store supplies in the jars and screw the jars to the lids



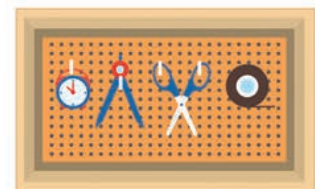
Use shoe racks to create extra shelf space

- Stack shoe shelves on top of desks for extra storage space



Utilize wall space with a pegboard

- Frame a pegboard
- Insert curved J-hooks into pegs
- Hang board near your desk to hold small items like scissors and tape



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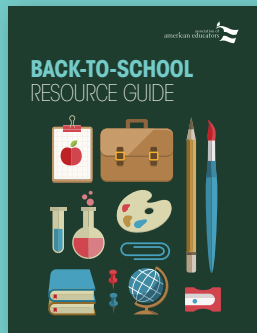


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AAE Teacher Survey of the Month

You're at a conference and about to open the program book. What session do you want to attend more than any other?

- Professionalism at Every Grade Level
- Professionalism: Understanding the Code of Ethics & Professional Expectations for Educators
- Getting Ready for Back-to-School: The New Tools You Need to Know About
- New Teachers: How to Start Your Career Right
- Rights, Roles, & Responsibilities
- Funding the Classroom with Grants
- The Importance of Teacher Leadership
- Other

- ▶ Take this one-question survey at tinyurl.com/aaeSept16Survey today and be entered to win an AAE prize pack—just for letting us know! You can also scan the QR code to take this survey on your phone.

