Ethics in action creates character

Ethical identity is strengthened with:

1. Clear core values

2. Behavioral definitions

3. Personal commitment

A Case for Ethical Identity

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Goal setting is an important focus at the start of a new school year. Is strengthening the "ethical identity" of your students a strategic goal for you? Ethical or moral identity is a powerful concept for teachers to understand and cultivate in their students. While researchers acknowledge ethical identity is not easily measured, there is literature that describes ethical identity as related to the importance students place on their commitment to ethical values like fairness, justice, respect and care for others. These values are typically recognized to have universal appeal across all successful cultures.

Students with strong ethical identities are recognized to be able to resist anti-social peer pressure, the use of rationalizations and take more personal responsibility for their actions. Strong ethical identity has been associated with students who cheat less and recognize their ethical commitment to others. Clearly ethical identity is a concept worth an investment in time and effort.

So how can teachers encourage their students' development of ethical identity? Four strategies are noted here to include identifying and defining core ethical values, identifying historical or literature exemplars of ethical values, encouraging democratic classroom practices and practicing analysis and reasoning with ethical values. Given the brevity of this newsletter, and as the later three all depend on identifying and defining core values, only this strategy will be described.

Core ethical values have been identified by a variety of authors and programs. The Character Counts coalition has identified their six pillars (core values) to include respect, caring, trustworthiness, responsibility, citizenship and fairness. The International Center for Academic Integrity has published their Fundamental Values Project, which advocates honesty, trust, respect, fairness, responsibility and courage as core values in support of academic integrity. The Institute for Global Ethics has presented results from multi-cultural inquiries into the values that respondents claim as essential and noted honesty, responsibility, compassion, fairness and respect were most often cited. Moral psychologist Jonathan Haidt has published his research that points to what he calls "intuitive" ethical values that are recognized by all cultures. Haidt's intuitive values are noted to be fairness, caring, loyalty, sanctity and liberty.

Without getting into the philosophical argument about the potential "relativism" of creating such lists, there is common sense recognition that core values can be reasonably identified and core values transcend and include all cultures in our pluralistic society. The first step for a class or school is to identify them, as done by the various groups and authors noted here. If you ask your students what core values they believe would help support a flourishing class, you would undoubtedly arrive at a similar list of values.

The next step is to define these core values. This process requires research into formal definitions and agreement as to clear and practical behavioral definitions of the terms. I've observed students who want to twist traditional definitions to meet their own goals.

Students will redefine fairness to include the acceptability of cheating when the school or teacher are considered unfair. This type of logic must be resisted with a greater depth of understanding of a definition of fairness that encourages honest and respectful interventions into school practices in the face of inequities. In addition, fairness can specifically open a discussion about other "qualifiers" of the term. Is fairness defined by the distribution of resources with equal proportions (possible inequity in favor of those that don't work) or by merit (possible disadvantage to those with special needs) or by extra allocations to those with special needs. Other values like loyalty, integrity and sanctity demand clarification and examples with reasonable application of dictionary definitions.

The other strategies note previously can all flow out of a shared identification and understanding of core values. Definitions are insufficient if not aspirational to encourage all class members to make a personal commitment to demonstrate core values. While ethical identity is not measured on standardized tests, it seems reasonable that standardize tests results might improve if our students were aware of and pursued their commitment to ethical identity.

Teachers Sought to Join Achieving with Integrity Project

SEE is recruiting High school English and social studies teachers to participate in the Achieving with Integrity (AwI) program to create lessons to

> ### SEE is Recruiting!

integrate into their existing curriculum in support of student ethical functioning. Volunteer teachers are sought who recognize the potential to improve student ethical functioning while completing meaningful analysis of subjects in literature or history.

Participating teachers will need to gain approval and access to computers to have students complete three on-line Survey Monkey surveys, one prior to lesson instruction, one immediately after the core lessons are completed (fall/winter 2015) and a final survey after three supplemental lessons are taught during the school year (spring 2016). For more information and access to a project application, teachers are invited to visit SEE's home page at www.ethicsed.org.

Character-Based Decision Making Webinars (October 2015)

SEE invites those interested in teaching a character-based decision making strategy to join us for a free two-part webinar on October 7 & 8. The two, 25 minute webinars are led by David B. Wangaard and support the strategies outlined in SEE's *The Golden Compass* workbook. More information can be found on SEE's home page and the free registration link via Go-to-Meeting is http://bit.ly/1gmJnu8

About SEE

The School for Ethical Education is a not-for-profit teaching agency in Milford, CT with the mission to advance strategies to put ethics in action to create character. As a non-sectarian 501(C)3 organization, SEE is partly supported by fees for service, grants and donations. For more information, visit our website at www.ethicsed.org

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