

The Power of Virtues Language to Inspire Learning

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Abstract

Educators know that words have the power to inspire and to encourage and that it is relationships that are key to helping students succeed in school and in life. Unfortunately, in this age of No Child Left Behind, they sometimes get amnesia and forget what is most important in education. This thesis is about lifting the veil and remembering why most teachers went into education to begin with. It will focus on how the first strategy of The Virtues Project, Speaking the Language of Virtues (Appendix B), can be used to inspire learning and bring out the best in students. In addition, it will touch on how online professional development can support the scalability of this project in today's economic climate.

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Introduction

“There can be no keener revelation of a society’s soul than the way in which it treats its children.” —Nelson Mandela (ASCD Whole Child Compact, 2007, p. 6)

The pressures on schools, educators and students are at an all-time high. School violence and bullying continue to escalate. The dropout rate is staggering at more than 30% (Alliance for Excellent Education, 2009, p. 2). The tensions of increased academic rigor add pressure to an already-challenged system. As well, school populations are increasingly diverse, and schools suffer from dwindling fiscal resources, yet are expected to do more for less. Federal testing mandates often overwhelm both teachers and students. Such tensions threaten the security, safety, progress and peace of our schools. According to the ASCD Whole Child Commission (2007), “schools and communities committed to educating the whole child foster engagement with and a sense of connection for students to the school community” (p. 15). It is strengthening the sense of connectedness for students that can reverse this frightening trend of violence, bullying, and increased dropout rate.

In 2003, The Center for Adolescent Health and Development at the University of Minnesota conducted research and held a conference on the topic of school connectedness. The team of researchers and educators worked together to develop a core set of principles to guide schools about the issues of school connectedness. This document is called the Wingspread Declaration on School Connections (2004), and includes the following five core elements:

- Student success increases through strengthened bonds with school.
- Students feel connected when they experience high expectations for academic success, feel supported by staff, and feel safe in their school.
- School connectedness affects critical accountability measures, such as academic

performance, fighting, truancy, and dropout rates.

- School connectedness increases educational motivation, classroom engagement, and attendance, which can then be linked to higher academic achievement.
- School connectedness can lower rates of disruptive behavior, substance and tobacco use, emotional distress, and early age of first sex. (p. 233)

Currently, schools are so focused on academic rigor that developing the “whole child’s” unique capacities for intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual learning are often overlooked, thus creating a lack of connectedness in schools. In addition, many educators are under the amnesia of No Child Left Behind. Because of the pressure to meet Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) and all of the other national, state, and local mandates and assessments, they are too focused on academic rigor. They often have forgotten why they went into teaching to begin with. They fail to bring into account all of what Jensen (2000) shares in his book about what brain research tells about learning and especially about the importance of relationships, choice, self-esteem, and motivation.

The Virtues Project is a grassroots organization that is in over 95 countries, was honored by the United Nations as “a model global program for all cultures”, and is endorsed by The Dalai Lama (Popov, 2008, p. 2). The Virtues Project signature contribution to creating a culture of connectedness is its 5 Strategies for bringing out the best in all people.

The Virtues Project 5 Strategies inspire individuals to live more authentic, joyful lives, families to raise children of compassion and integrity, educators to create safe, caring and high performing learning communities & leaders to inspire excellence and ethics in the workplace. (Popov, 2008, p. 2)

1. Speak the Language of Virtues: Language has the power to inspire or to discourage. Using virtues to acknowledge, guide, correct and thank awakens the best within us.
2. Recognize Teachable Moments: Recognizing the virtues needed in daily challenges helps us to become lifelong learners open to the lessons of character.
3. Set Clear Boundaries: Boundaries based on respect and restorative justice create a climate of peace, cooperation and safety in our homes, schools and communities.
4. Honor the Spirit: We sustain our vision and purpose by integrating virtues into our activities, surroundings, celebrations and the arts.
5. Offer Companionship: Being deeply present and listening with compassionate curiosity guides others to find clarity and to create their own solutions. It supports healing and growth. (Popov, 2000, p. 6)

In the year 2020, no one will know the specific 21st Century Skills that students will need to be successful in life and in work; however, everyone can be sure students will need all of their virtues. The simplest and most significant way educators can nurture these skills and help students develop their virtues is by modeling good character, naming virtues when educators see them being used by students, as well as bringing their attention to the virtues during teachable moments.

What are the 21st Century Skills students need in order to be successful in work and in life?

In a workplace that offers diminishing job security, their ability to interact well with others and adapt to change will matter more than technical expertise. And in their personal lives, young people face a challenge of building healthy relationships and a life of noble purpose in a culture that is often unsupportive of the highest values of the human

spirit. (Lickona, 2008, p. 1)

Speaking the Language of the Virtues, as well as utilizing the other 4 Strategies of The Virtues Project, supports the Life and Career Skills Objectives of the 21st Century Skills Initiative. As Daniel Goleman (2005) suggests in his book *Emotional Intelligence* that the content of what educators traditionally teach in schools is only 20% of what students need to be successful, it is really 80% of the emotional intelligence (EQ). EQ is a large part of what The Virtues Project focuses on developing in individuals.

Though the primary content of this thesis is about using language to strengthen students' performance and moral character thus increasing academic achievement as well as their overall feeling of success and love learning, online learning will be used as the way to share this information with educators across the US. The development of an NEA (National Education Association) online course is currently underway for the NEA Online Academy. A Virtues Project overview course will be offered free to anyone wishing to take it. In addition, a Facebook group, TeacherTube channel, blog, and variety of podcasts will be used to enhance the online course. Below is an overview of the benefits of online learning and a description of what makes online learning a positive experience.

There are many benefits to online professional development. It can be extremely flexible, economical, scalable, efficient and offer superior quality content.

According to Milligan, "Online delivery can be extremely flexible" (Milligan, 1999, p. 11). Online content can be updated and modified quickly when more current, relevant information is found. It is also easy to edit and correct mistakes. Online learning can offer multiple pathways to learning, thus meeting a variety of different learning styles, interests, and abilities. For example, students who are auditory learners may do well by listening to podcasts

of the material being offered while visual learners might prefer reading and watching videos of the content. Intrapersonal learners have the freedom and flexibility to learn in the peace and quiet of their own personal space while interpersonal learners can gather a group to work through the content as a community of learners. In addition, online learning allows students to work at their own pace, from any location at any time of day.

“Online delivery is economical, scalable and efficient” (Milligan, 1999, p. 11). Once the cost for creating an online course is taken care of, the cost of offering online professional development is economical and scalable. Online materials are cheaper to offer than materials that are printed or products that need to be reproduced and shipped, such as DVDs and CDs. In addition, in a self-contained online course, it does not matter whether there is one student or 5,000 students, as long as the server can handle the amount of users, the content can be delivered to more people than in a traditional face-to-face course. Additionally, there is quality control and consistency that does not translate in traditional face-to-face classrooms with different instructors teaching the same course at different locations. Online instruction is an excellent way to lower travel costs for consultants and/or students because they can work from whatever location is best for them. In this tight economy, being able to offer and access quality online professional development saves money on hotels, airfare, parking, rental cars, food, and other miscellaneous expenses. Saving money and having access to quality professional development is of central importance to schools these days.

“Online material can be of superior quality” (Milligan, 1999, p. 12). Since online learning requires a lot of preparation up front, gathering excellent resources ahead of time and pulling the content together in a way that is interactive can be superior to offering face-to-face workshops where instructors do not have to have everything ready until the last minute. Being able to get

feedback from students on a regular basis and modify modules allows the course to continue to be revised so that it gets better with each revision.

All of this is not to say that online learning is better than face-to-face instruction. It is a powerful alternative, especially when people are looking at economies of scale, access to individuals who for whatever reason cannot get to the face-to-face professional development, as well as a way of maintaining consistency across all sections of a course.

Effective online learning is engaging. Giving the learner opportunities for communication, collaboration and reflection, as well as authentic opportunities to apply the knowledge to the real world, is crucial. Using technologies such as Wimba and iChat give learners an opportunity to connect and share. Giving learners the opportunities to work in small groups of four to ten supports Vygotsky's theory that people learn in social situations and having authentic opportunities to collaborate and connect is critical to deepening one's understanding. Using technologies such as podcasts, TeacherTube, VoiceThread, blogs, and Facebook allow students to not only connect to quality content but also to be collaborative creators of the content.

Thesis Statement

In this current climate of performance based academic rigor, most educators have failed to meet the affective domain needs of PREK-12 public school students. Research has shown that when students feel disconnected at school, student achievement decreases, the dropout rate increases, disciplinary incidents increase, and the overall climate is less conducive to learning.

By giving timely, specific, and meaningful feedback to PREK-12 public school students that acknowledges positive acts, guides, and corrects behaviors educators want to change, the use of this feedback will strengthen both students' moral and performance character thus increasing their academic achievement as well as their overall feeling of success and love of learning.

Educational Significance

Language has the power to inspire or discourage. Using the language of the virtues to acknowledge, guide and correct is a way to empower all students to be the best they can be without shaming or blaming. By providing timely, specific and “meaningful” feedback to students it will help them strengthen both their moral and performance character.

For example, instead of just saying, “Good job” when a student does something well, say, “I see your determination in the way you worked through that hard Algebra problem.” Using virtues to acknowledge is specific and meaningful and helps the student see the specific virtue they used and how that virtue was witnessed. If a student is going to need to call on their virtue, instead of lecturing to students such as, “We have a guest speaker today, no texting or talking,” use virtues to guide their behavior such as, “We will have a guest speaker today; please be courteous by listening with your full attention and please keep cell phones in your backpacks.” In this example, students see that courtesy is giving their full attention and not using their cell phones.

A growth virtue is a virtue that someone is working on to develop and strengthen. For example, someone may be very enthusiastic, which is a strength virtue, but not be able to call on patience and wait to share their idea, therefore patience is a growth virtue. It is best to acknowledge a virtue when a student is working on that virtue. It helps the student to see that they do have that virtue within them and they can call on it when they need it.

In addition to acknowledging virtues verbally, educators can also write down acknowledgements in the form of notes or virtues vouchers. Writing the acknowledgement is a great home school connection and supports schools who use the Positive Behavior Intervention

System of rewards. Written acknowledgement is also a great way to support students who are visual, they can have a concrete representation of how they used their virtue.

Finally, when a student fails to use their virtue, such as not being peaceful and hitting another student, use a virtues statement to correct the behavior: “In our class we are peaceful; we use our words even when we are angry.”

Speaking the Language of the Virtues is not an add-on curriculum; it is a language and a lens for creating connections and a culture of caring in all schools, grades PreK through graduate school.

Since virtues are universally agreed-upon positive qualities of character (Appendix C), this project applies to schools and classrooms all over the world. The project is currently in over 95 countries. In May of 2008, two high school teachers from Baltimore, Maryland were trained as Virtues Project Facilitators and made the front page of *The Baltimore Sun* newspaper (Appendix D) for the inspiring use of the language in their school. In January of 2009, a Virtues Project facilitator trained 1,000 educators in Africa. In the Fall of 2008, educators from all of the high schools in Pocatello, Idaho, as well as their board of education, parents, and high school students were trained on the 5 Strategies and the project keeps spreading throughout the state (Kavelin-Popov, 2009).

In addition, work is being done with the founders of The Virtues Project to create electronic media and other materials to support the scalability and sustainability of this project. Recently, the National Education Association contracted with The Virtues Project and The Heart of Education to develop an online course around the 5 Strategies of The Virtues Project. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, the National Board for Professional

Teaching Standards, and the National Commission for Teaching and America's Future have agreed to sponsor the course and help get the word out to other educators.

The language of the virtues addresses the affective domain of individuals and helps to connect the head and heart. Since the language is positive and has to do with feelings, it is highly motivating, especially to individuals with disabilities and exceptional students since they often experience frustration. The language of the virtues helps educators use empowering words to support student success and it also helps educators see these students as beautiful and capable classroom citizens.

The language of the virtues can be applied to many different mediums. Print is simple for conveying the meaning of the virtues through stories, articles, letters, and virtues vouchers. Educators can also create a wordwall of all of the virtues.

There are many inspiring songs that have virtues in them and educators can use different forms of music to help students connect with the virtues they have inside such as playing gently music to inspire peacefulness or high energy music to create enthusiasm. Recording virtues acknowledgements for students is a way of helping students remember who they really are.

Video clips are great to be used as a springboard for a discussion on certain virtues. Film Clips for Character Education is a great resource for getting clips from popular movies that go along with a virtue. Having students create their own virtues-mercials or public service announcements is way to support students in using their virtues of creativity and service.

Definition of Terms

- Affective Domain: domain dealing with attitudes, values, and motivation (Beland, 2005)

- Character Education: “Character education is a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible, and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share. It is the 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. Character education is not a ‘quick fix’ (CEP, 2009) It provides long-term solutions that address moral, ethical, and academic issues that are of growing concern about our society and the safety of our schools” (CEP, 2009, p. 3)
- Good: referring to moral qualities of character to such as respect, caring, and justice (Lickona & Davidson, 2005)
- Moral Character: virtues such as “integrity, respect, cooperation, and justice” (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, p. xv)
- Online Professional Development: teacher training that is facilitated through the use of the Internet
- Performance Character: virtues such as “a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, and perseverance” (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, p. xv)
- Smart: referring to performance qualities of character such as diligence, excellence and purposefulness (Lickona & Davidson, 2005)
- Virtues: universal positive qualities of character agreed upon by all major cultures and religions (Popov, 2000)

Literature Review

Character Education

There is a strong correlation between academic achievement and character education (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2008). As well, research emphasizes the importance of committing to the explicate instruction of character. Speaking the Language of the Virtues is a way to be explicate in terms of character instruction without it being an add-on curriculum.

Recent findings of the report, What Works in Character Education (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005), show that “effective character education supports and enhances the academic goals of schools: good character education promotes learning” (p. 4). This report also stresses the importance of taking character education as seriously as academic education. The Eleven Principles Sourcebook, developed by the Character Education Partnership, encompasses the most helpful information about character education to date (Beland, 2005). The Sourcebook is broken into 11 separate guidebooks detailing the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education. Within each guidebook are best practices taken directly from award winning character education schools as well as information from top researchers and programs in the field of character education. The first 2 guidebooks have examples from the Virtues Project as a way for schools to develop core ethical values and develop effective character education programs that encompass the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of the moral life.

Positive Language

Educators know that language influences students’ perceptions of themselves as learners (Denton, 2008). However, educators don’t always know how to talk to students to help them be the best they can be. Speaking the Language of the Virtues is a strategy that awakens the best within everyone. In addition to speaking the language, educators understand that thoughts have power over students’ performance. Whether a student believes they can or they cannot, they are right.

Dr. Emoto (2004) discovered through the use of high-speed photography that water that had been exposed to positive thoughts and positive words crystallized in beautiful patterns and that water exposed to negative thoughts and negative language formed dull, asymmetrical patterns. This has huge implications, given that people are primarily made up of water (Emoto, 2004). It is vitally important to people's health; emotional, physical and spiritual, that they use language to empower not discourage. Speaking the Language of the Virtues is not just important in school, it is important in all aspects of life.

Relationships and Motivation

When it comes to relationship and motivation, educators are taught the 3 Rs: rigor, relevance, and relationships. Unfortunately, often times only rigor is remembered. Speaking the Language of Virtues supports Brain-based learning in that the language helps strengthen relationships by building trust (Jensen, 2000). When trust is established in a classroom, learning is more easily attained. In addition, when students are successful they feel better about themselves and do not need to act out for attention.

In his book *Social Intelligence*, Daniel Goleman (2006) talks about the importance of strengthening our social intelligence, and claims that it has “far-reaching biological impacts...making good relationships like vitamins and bad relationships like poison” (p. 14). This has important implications for schools, given that they are social learning environments. Being positive and Speaking the Language of the Virtues not only helps to strengthen relationships, it is good for one's health.

Whole Child and Social and Emotional Learning

The Whole Child Compact is a powerful resource that identifies the importance of addressing the social, emotional, physical, intellectual and spiritual domains of a child in order to nurture the development of a “whole child” (Pace Marshal, 2007). Its research supports best practices in all five of these areas. It was written to counteract the testing and academic rigor focus as a result of No Child Left Behind and was pulled together by a variety of wise individuals who were part of ASCD’s Whole Child Commission. The Whole Child Compact is in direct alignment with *Speaking the Language of the Virtues* because the language supports the development of the social, emotional, physical, intellectual, and spiritual domains of a child.

Virtues

It takes awareness, understanding, action and reflection to help individuals internalize virtues (Bohlin, 2002). It is critical that educators, nurture performance character and moral character to help students become “smart” and “good” (Lickona and Davidson, 2005). *Speaking the Language of the Virtues* helps students to identify, call on and strengthen their virtues on a daily basis.

21st Century Skills

In his book, *A Whole New Mind*, Daniel Pink (2006) talks about the 21st Century Skills needed today, and in the future, are no longer those solely from the left hemisphere of the human brains (Partnership for 21st Century Schools, 2004). In fact, it is the creativity functions from the right side of the brain that is needed now such as design, story, symphony, empathy, play, and meaning. *Speaking the Language of the Virtues* helps individual to develop empathy and find meaning in work and play.

Current/Past Solutions to Thesis Problem in Practice

To date, there are numerous different character education programs and professional development opportunities that offer products and strategies to help create a culture of caring and connectedness in schools. The Character Education Partnership (CEP) is the umbrella organization for character education and holds an annual conference each fall showcasing best practices in character education. In addition, CEP offers professional development workshops around the 11 Principles of Effective Character Education (Appendix E). Some of the character education programs that are in schools include Character Counts, Peacebuilders, Learning for Life, Positive Action, Communities of Caring and Responsive Classroom (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

Though there are numerous programs, they are often add-ons to the curriculum and get reduced to slogans on the walls and/or once a month assemblies. In addition, the professional development that is offered to educators is focused on how educators can teach students character instead of showing educators how to model and strengthen their own character. They also do not focus on the power of language to inspire students to become smart and good.

Proposed Solutions to Thesis Problem

Focusing on how Strategy 1 of The Virtues Project, Speaking the Language of the Virtues, will offer educators an opportunity to learn strategies that will not only strengthen their relationships with their students but also with their colleagues, friends, family, and the community at large. In addition, by focusing on the virtues and using the language, educators' individual virtues will be strengthened and they will see the world in a more positive light, having higher expectations of all the good that is possible in each student.

Using technology to offer engaging online professional development teaches educators how to give timely, specific, and meaningful feedback to preK-12 public school students that acknowledges positive acts, guides and corrects behaviors educators want to change to strengthen students' moral and performance character, therefore increasing their academic achievement as well as their overall feeling of success and love of learning. It also provides personal and organizational development, improving relationships in all aspects of educators' lives.

Educators are able to work through the online virtues course on their own time and at their own pace. Visual learners can thoroughly read the text as well as watch the video clips over and over again, to deepen their understanding. Auditory learners can listen to the course as well as the additional podcasts to immerse themselves in the content of the course. For educators who prefer to work collaboratively, they may go through the course material together, discussing their reflections instead of journaling. For educators who prefer to work alone, they can reflect by journaling. Whether an intrapersonal or interpersonal learner, educators can connect via the Facebook Group, VoiceThread, and blogs to share their thoughts, feelings, and ideas. The online, interactive forums insure that the course is not a standalone training, but supports ongoing learning. Additionally, if educators would like more in-depth, face-to-face training, there is an option at the end of the online course to request more training. They can even train to become a Virtues Project Facilitator and share this work with others.

Integration of Proposed Solutions with Current/Past Solutions

One of the great features of The Virtues Project and Speaking the Language of the Virtues is that it can be incorporated to enhance any program currently being used. Character Counts! has asked The Virtues Project to work with them on some new initiatives, and educators

who participate in Responsive Classroom love the specificity of the language of the virtues for bringing out the best in their students and others.

Virtues Cards are a tool that helps people learn the meaning of each virtue and what it looks like in action. Many other character education programs, such as American Students Fund, use the Virtues Cards to strengthen their understanding of the language and action of the virtues.

Conclusions

Each moment we live never was before and will never be again. And yet what we teach children in school is $2 + 2 = 4$ and Paris is the capital of France. What we should be teaching them is what they are. We should be saying: “Do you know what you are? You are a marvel. You are unique. In all the world there is no other child exactly like you. In the millions of years that have passed, there has never been another child exactly like you. You may become a Shakespeare, a Michelangelo, a Beethoven. You have the capacity for anything. Yes, you are a marvel. —*Pablo Casals* (ASCD Whole Child Compact, 2007, p. 5)

Through interactions with responsive, respectful adults—regardless of their role within a child’s life—children learn to imitate, and then internalize, valued social, physical, cognitive, or ethical behaviors. When children believe that the adults around them care about who they are and what they know and what they can do, they are more likely to respond to what those adults value and take those values as their own (ASCD Whole Child Compact, 2007).

What educators say and how they say it is one of the most powerful teaching tools. It permeates every aspect of teaching. Educators cannot teach a lesson, welcome a student into the room, or handle a classroom conflict without using words (Denton, 2008).

Vygotsky's research demonstrated that "Language actually shapes thoughts, feelings and experiences" (Denton, 2008, p. 28). It is imperative that educators are empowered (and other adults who work with students) with a language to help students feel safe, connected, and supported to be the best they can be. The language of the virtues does just that.

When adults use the language of the virtues to acknowledge positive acts, guide and correct behaviors educators want to change, the use of this feedback will strengthen both students' moral and performance character thus increasing their academic achievement, as well as their overall feeling of success and love of learning.

Suggestions for Further Research

Though much research has been done on the power of language and how it inspires or discourages individuals, quantitative research is needed to demonstrate the impact of virtues language to enhance academic achievement. In this culture of accountability, it would be helpful to do a comprehensive research study on the effects of all 5 of the Strategies of The Virtues Project in order to get the project into all schools across the United States.

Currently, this researcher and professionals from ChildTrends, a research organization in Washington, D.C., have a proposal in to the Templeton Foundation for a research study. Appendix F contains the letter of interest to Templeton.

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Appendix A

THE FIVE STRATEGIES

The Five Strategies of The Virtues Project inspire individuals to live more authentic, joyful lives, families to raise children of compassion and integrity, educators to create safe, caring and high performing learning communities, and leaders to inspire excellence and ethics in the workplace.



1. Speak the Language of Virtues

Language has the power to inspire or to discourage. Using virtues to acknowledge, guide, correct and thank awakens the best within us.



2. Recognize Teachable Moments

Recognizing the virtues needed in daily challenges helps us to become lifelong learners open to the lessons of character.



3. Set Clear Boundaries

Boundaries based on respect and restorative justice create a climate of peace, cooperation and safety in our homes, schools and communities.



4. Honor the Spirit

We sustain our vision and purpose by integrating virtues into our activities, surroundings, celebrations and the arts.



5. Offer Companionship

Being deeply present and listening with compassionate curiosity guides others to find clarity and to create their own solutions. It supports healing and growth.



HOW TO SPEAK THE LANGUAGE OF VIRTUES



THERE ARE USUALLY THREE ELEMENTS OF A VIRTUES STATEMENT:

- 1) an opening phrase;
- 2) a virtue;
- 3) how the virtue is being shown or needs to be shown.

---TO ACKNOWLEDGE AND THANK---

<p>It was You were really I see your I honor you for your Thank you for being I appreciate your</p>	<p>kind patient generosity courage flexible helpfulness</p>	<p>of you to babysit. to wait so long. in sharing your lunch. in standing up to him. about changing the time. with loading my boxes.</p>
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---TO GUIDE--

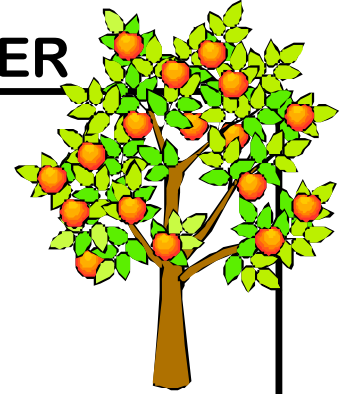
<p>Please be We need to be How can we show What will help you find your I would appreciate it if you would be</p>	<p>considerate respectful courtesy courage flexible</p>	<p>about the volume of your music. by listening to what each person says. for her? to face that challenge? about changing the time.</p>
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---TO CORRECT--

<p>Please be What would help you to be What is a We need to be</p>	<p>kind. tactful respectful peaceful.</p>	<p>That remark hurt. even when you're irritated? way to say that? What would be fair to both of you?</p>
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VIRTUES: THE GIFTS OF CHARACTER



- | | |
|---------------|-----------------|
| Assertiveness | Integrity |
| Caring | Joyfulness |
| Cleanliness | Justice |
| Commitment | Kindness |
| Compassion | Love |
| Confidence | Loyalty |
| Consideration | Moderation |
| Cooperation | Modesty |
| Courage | Orderliness |
| Courtesy | Patience |
| Creativity | Peacefulness |
| Detachment | Perseverance |
| Determination | Purposefulness |
| Diligence | Reliability |
| Enthusiasm | Respect |
| Excellence | Responsibility |
| Flexibility | Self-discipline |
| Forgiveness | Service |
| Friendliness | Tact |
| Generosity | Thankfulness |
| Gentleness | Tolerance |
| Helpfulness | Trust |
| Honesty | Trustworthiness |
| Honor | Truthfulness |
| Humility | Understanding |
| Idealism | Unity |



Appendix D

“Virtues Project” Encourages Students to Find the Good in Themselves

Approach is one of several used in metro area schools to improve behavior

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In a skit on the day's highlighted virtue, honesty, Shayna Falwell (second from right) plays a dishonest salesperson with other Kenwood High ninth-graders (from left) Alex Mehall, Walter Scott, Zuryna Smith and Stevie Slaughter. (Baltimore Sun photo by Amy Davis / November 26, 2008)

Standing in a locker room at Baltimore County's Kenwood High School, the teenage girl kept her cool when one of her peers passed by and hit her with a book bag. "Under normal circumstances, that would have been a major fight in our building," said teacher Nancy Hanlin, recounting the incident. Instead, Hanlin said, the girl told her classmate that she would have hit back "if I wasn't working on my virtues."

The fight that wasn't illustrates the changes that school officials say they are seeing at Kenwood, where a new character education initiative called the Virtues Project has begun altering the way teachers, administrators and students communicate with one another. The "virtues" are 52 good character traits, such as truthfulness, patience, responsibility and self-discipline.

"Our kids are so used to all of us telling them what they did wrong," said Hanlin, who, along with physical education and sports science chair Tammy Jackson, suggested trying the project. "Instead of looking at the behavior, we're actually looking at the kids." Teachers use the virtues to acknowledge, guide and correct students, said Dara Feldman, director of education initiatives for the project and a former Montgomery County teacher who used its principles in her classroom.

Teachers might take a moment to thank someone for his honesty in returning a missing item or suggest a teen consider what traits she needs to call on to deal with a crisis, according to Jackson and Assistant Principal Allison Seymour.

The State Department of Education encourages, but does not mandate, character education. Such initiatives vary throughout the state, and even within districts. "We want students to become good students, but we also want them to become good citizens," said Paula McCoach, an education specialist in the state agency's youth development branch. "Character education ... has influences on the climate of the building and the school itself."

Kenwood appears to be the first Baltimore County school to adopt the Virtues Project. Feldman has also trained educators in Anne Arundel, Howard and Montgomery counties and in Baltimore City, she said, but Kenwood has taken "a holistic, excellent approach."

The school draws students from the Essex and Middle River areas, which have many struggling families, said Paul D. Martin, the principal. Students come from "a tough environment," Hanlin said. "They just want to survive in their neighborhood. They bring that into our building." Still, fighting at Kenwood has declined over the past several years, Martin said, and the project has helped even more.

"The virtues that are on that paper, all of us possess," Jackson said, referring to the list of character traits. "It just takes someone to verbalize that." Among the educators' tools is a set of cards, each featuring a different virtue and providing a description of that trait. A virtue is spotlighted every month.

"Basically, what it's all about is teaching social skills," said Tom Zirpoli, an education professor at McDaniel College who has written books about behavior and classroom management and parenting.

Character education programs "teach kids, and they teach teachers, to focus on ethical behaviors - honesty, caring about other people ... judging right from wrong," Zirpoli said. Family involvement is key, he said, and such programs should be integrated throughout the curriculum. Yet implementation can be difficult at the high-school level, with so many other demands, such as tests and graduation requirements, said Lisa Boarman, coordinator of school counseling and related services for Howard County schools. There, dozens of schools use a framework highlighting 40 traits that are integral to success, she said.

In Anne Arundel and Carroll counties, and other areas, many schools follow a model called Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, or PBIS. Its goal is to promote safe and supportive schools and change behavior, said Virginia L. Dolan, an Anne Arundel schools facilitator on the state PBIS leadership team.

While schools in Baltimore County can choose their programs, the district is trying to "bring a more consistent character development program in our buildings," to ensure that everyone is "speaking the same language," said Glenda Myrick, coordinator of the office of safe and drug-free schools.

The Virtues Project has become the approved training course to help county educators begin or enhance character education in their buildings, Myrick said. Hanlin and Jackson taught a fall session, and there are plans to hold another this spring, Myrick said.

At Kenwood, PBIS didn't seem to work well for students, said Hanlin, who said she has seen "a gamut" of character education initiatives in her nearly 35 years of teaching. She and Jackson learned of the Virtues Project about a year ago from Feldman and brought the idea back to Seymour and Martin.

Last year, they began with about eight students who weren't "the easy kids," as Martin described them. "If you can tackle some of the kids that are going to be something of a challenge ... then that automatically gives this program more oomph," he said.

The teachers regularly met with those students, having them select virtue cards and identify the traits they already possessed and the ones that needed work.

One student, for whom swearing and shouting were the norm, began attending class regularly and improving her grades. A student who screamed at Hanlin one day came back within the hour to apologize for disrespecting her.

Now the school has a Virtues Group of about 30 students who serve as ambassadors of sorts for the project. In November, a Virtue Day introduced it to the freshmen taking International Baccalaureate classes.

During one group meeting, students shared "virtues statements" they had recently made to people. "I told my little sister that I appreciate her helpfulness," said Vanessa Lazo, a junior. "She looked at me funny at first. And she said, 'You're welcome.'"

Junior Jackie Kemmer, one of the students Jackson began working with last year, said she resisted learning about the "weird" Virtues Project. But she found herself driven to try developing the traits on the cards she picked, she said: "The challenge just makes you want to try more."

Lazo said the group is the first school activity she has participated in, even recruiting a friend to join. "You learn things you can use not only in school but outside of school," she said. She is working on patience, she said, particularly with her little sisters. But she knows her strengths, including caring, consideration and thankfulness.

"I feel like it's going to spread in a positive way," said senior Annette Karanja, adding that she felt the student group would have a multiplier effect.

"We're planting seeds," Hanlin said. "You just hope that it goes and it grows."

Appendix E

The Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education

According to the Character Education Partnership, “There is no single script for effective character education, but there are some important basic principles. The following eleven principles serve as criteria that schools and other groups can use to plan a character education effort. They can be used in conjunction with CEP's Character Education Quality Standards to evaluate available character education programs, books, and curriculum resources.

Principle 1 Promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.

Principle 2 Defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.

Principle 3 Uses a comprehensive, intentional, proactive, and effective approach to character development.

Principle 4 Creates a caring school community.

Principle 5 Provides students with opportunities for moral action.

Principle 6 Includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.

Principle 7 Strives to foster students’ self-motivation.

Principle 8 Engages the school staff as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of students.

Principle 9 Fosters shared moral leadership and long range support of the character education initiative.

Principle 10 Engages families and community members as partners in the character-building effort.

Principle 11 Evaluates the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

<http://www.character.org/site/c.ipIJKTOEJsG/b.3438707/>

Appendix F

Letter of Interest to Templeton Foundation to Fund Research about The Virtues Project

February 2009

Theoretical and Empirical Rationale

Introduction. Maintaining order in the classroom is a primary challenge for contemporary teachers. Disorder undermines the ability of teachers to teach and of students to learn. A positive approach that models and rewards positive behavior, builds strengths within students, improves interaction among classmates, reduces teacher turnover, and enhances learning is widely needed. However, this approach cannot take time away from instruction, given the press on teachers and school administrators to raise test scores. The Virtues Project Framework is such an approach. It is a grassroots initiative with the goal of improving the quality of classroom interaction; but no metrics exist to assess classroom quality implementation or results. The purpose of the proposed project is to develop and validate measures of interaction quality among teachers and among students in elementary and middle schools.

The Virtues Project was founded in 1991 to counteract rising violence among youth and families and is now used in over 90 countries to help schools and communities create a culture of character. It was honored by the United Nations in 1994 as a “model global program for families of all cultures” and is endorsed by The Dalai Lama, who said, “I fully support The Virtues Project which promotes such universal values as love, kindness, justice and service.” Currently, The Virtues Project is collaborating with the National Education Association (NEA) to create an online course for the NEA Professional Development Academy. Additionally, The Virtues Project has been asked by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) to help them infuse The Five Strategies of The Virtues Project into the ASCD Strategic Plan as well as their Whole Child Initiative. In addition, the Virtues Project is being applied to the Father Involvement Initiative’s “Building Our Children’s Character Program”, which is sponsored through The Public Health Agency of Canada. The Project is being implemented in schools and youth programs such as The Boys & Girls Clubs throughout North America, to “get the character slogans off the walls and into behavior.”

Testimonials from schools around the world suggest that the five simple strategies of The Virtues Project Framework bring out the best in both students and educators. Attendance, achievement, and self-esteem increase. Discipline referrals decrease and anecdotal evidence suggests that bullies are often transformed into leaders. The overall climate of the school is more peaceful and joyful, resulting in less stress for everyone and allowing staff and students to thrive. However, no rigorous evaluations of the Virtues Project have been conducted.

Our longer-term goal is to conduct a random assignment evaluation of the Virtues Project; however, first, it is necessary to develop methods of assessing the quality of classroom interactions that this project seeks to change.

The Virtues Project Framework. The Virtues Project offers instructional materials, professional development, youth leadership, family outreach programs and above all five simple strategies that administrators, educators, families and students can use to create an environment

where students learn to be smart and choose to be good. This is not an add-on curriculum. It is a language and a lens that can be easily integrated into all aspects of the school and community to create a culture of character.

The Five Strategies or Domains of a Quality classroom, described in The Virtues Project Educator's Guide, and reflected in virtues posters and cards for use at home and at school are the heart of this simple approach. These strategies seek to create a climate of character within schools and build a foundation for safe and caring communities (Kavelin Popov, 2000). We believe that these five domains represent quality classrooms.

Domain 1: Positive Teacher language and communication (Speak the Language of Virtues) -Language shapes character. The way teachers speak, and the words they use, can discourage or inspire. Language that replaces shaming and blaming with personal responsibility and respect is a key aspect of quality interactions.

Domain 2: Recognize Teachable Moments - Recognizing life lessons and virtues in daily situations strengthens humility and confidence to learn from mistakes. Instead of negatively labeling students, they are called on to act on the qualities of their character.

Domain 3: Set Clear Boundaries - Clear boundaries based on respect, restorative justice, and reparation provide a positive approach to school-wide discipline and create a climate of peace and safety. Personal boundaries protect time and energy.

Domain 4: Engage the Whole Child (Honor the Spirit) - The goal is to create a safe, caring, respectful learning environment and a shared vision of a positive school and community spirit. It is required, but it is also inspired through acknowledgements and celebrations, creative expressions through the arts, and daily modeling of the virtues.

Domain 5: Offer Companionship - By being deeply present and listening with compassion and detachment, this counseling approach empowers others to make moral choices, find peaceful resolutions to conflict, and heal inner hurts.

The Research Base for the Virtues Framework. Like many community interventions, the Virtues project was not formulated based on a formal review of the child development or education literatures. Nevertheless, research-based elements are incorporated into both the general approach and the specific actions embodied in the Virtues Project approach. For example, the virtues framework uses positive reinforcement rather than punishment to establish desired behaviors. Considerable research has identified positive reinforcement as an approach that is especially effective in bringing about behaviors that are maintained over time and across settings (Margolin, 2007;). Similarly, the virtues framework avoids didactic lectures, an approach which numerous evaluations have found does not change behavior (Child Trends, 2003). The virtues framework avoids shaming and ridicule () but seeks to help children develop self-regulation (), a skill that contributes to both academic and social success (Cameron et al., 2007; Leong & Bodrova, 2003; Nota, Soresi, & Zimmerman, 2005). In addition, because the teacher uses the Virtues approach in every day situations, the children are provided with a concrete role model for the desired behavior () and they are given repeated

opportunities to practice and improve the desired behavior. Practice is another research-based strategy that enhances learning. In addition, the virtues framework also has clear goals, an important characteristic of effective interventions (Moore & Ochiltree, 2001). The virtues framework also recognizes that learning is more likely to occur when children are not highly anxious, aroused or fearful (), states that can undermine learning not only in the short run but also in the longer run, as brain research is showing that frequent high arousal can change brain wiring in a negative direction while calming can improve children's functioning ().

Relation to No Child Left Behind Legislation. In addition to having important research-based attributes, the Virtues Project Framework is complementary to *No Child Left Behind* because it does not take time away from other classroom activities, except for teacher training. It is an approach to classroom management rather than a written curriculum. Effectively implemented, the Virtues Project framework should reduce class time spent monitoring and dealing with behavior problems, which increasing children's time on task and capacity for learning.

Current Measures of Classroom Quality. Measures assessing the classroom environment typically focus on a construct termed "classroom climate" (e.g. Barclay, 1983; Brand et al., 2003; Fraser, Anderson, & Wahlberg, 1991; Humphrey, 1984; Johnson et al., 1985; Moos, 1994; Moos & Trickett, 1986; Valesky, 1990; van Horn, 2003). These types of measures have been used on an elementary (e.g. Sink & Spencer, 2005), middle (e.g. Abrami & Chambers, 1994), and high school population (e.g. Ghaith, 2003). Researchers identify the following five aspects of classroom climate: 1) Cohesiveness among students, 2) friction among students, 3) difficulty with class work, 4) student satisfaction with the class, and 5) competition among students.

These classroom climate measures may indirectly assess some aspects of the Virtues Project strategies in that they address potential positive by-products of the project's strategies. For example, high levels of cohesiveness and satisfaction and low levels of friction and competition could be indicative that clear boundaries have been established and that these boundaries have created an environment of peacefulness and safety (Strategy 3) or that the teacher is skilled at recognizing teachable moments when children are treating one another with a lack of respect (Strategy 2).

Though the classroom climate measures capture the essence of some of the constructs that we would like to address in the assessment of the Virtues Project, they are not complete with regards to directly assessing all the strategies implemented in the program. Specifically, these measurement tools do not directly assess the teacher/student interactions that characterize a number of the strategies used in the program (e.g. the teacher's ability to practice the art of companionship or the use of positive language by the teacher). The existing classroom climate measures assess potential by-products of these strategies, but they do not assess the actual implementation of them.

Researchers have conducted exploratory case studies examining specific teaching techniques that are used to create a positive classroom climate. The purpose of these case studies has been to examine potential factors that create a positive climate. For example, Pierce (2007) interviewed and observed a teacher with a reputation for her effectiveness in teaching at-risk

students. Pierce concluded that her techniques had three identifiable components: 1) A classroom organization based upon sensitivity towards others, 2) the teacher providing support to the students, and 3) enthusiasm and nurturance towards the students. These techniques appear to align closely with the strategies presented in the Virtues Project. Furthermore, Pianta and Steinberg (1992) developed the Student Teacher Relationship Scale (STRS), which assesses levels of closeness and conflict between teachers and students.

Though these case studies and STRS measure provide a basis for the Virtues measures development, more research needs to be conducted on these teacher/student relationships. Furthermore, a more dynamic measure, which assesses the use of all the strategies encompassed by the Virtues Project needs to be developed. Our proposed measures will be designed to assess the actual teaching behaviors and classroom interactions that reflect the five strategies described in the Virtues Project.

Research Questions

Our primary goal for this research project is to develop two measures of classroom quality (an observational measures and teacher report) that capture and operationalize the 5 domains of the Virtues framework (positive teacher communication, recognize teachable moments; setting clear boundaries; engaging the whole child; and offer companionship)

Based on these goals, we have developed several research questions that could be addressed:

1. Are these measures psychometrically reliable and valid? Specifically, do they have internal reliability, criterion validity, and predictive validity?
2. Can teachers accurately report in the self-report measure on all the domains of the virtues framework?
3. How long or how many observations would need to be conducted in order to have a valid observational measure of classroom quality?
4. What level of training is necessary to achieve adequate inter-rater reliability on the observational measure?
5. What is the agreement between teacher reports of classroom quality and the observational measures of these quality domains?
6. How applicable are these measures for different age groups (elementary, middle, high school)?
7. How applicable are these measure for schools with diverse socio-demographic characteristics?
8. How do these measures relate to established measures of student engagement and task motivation?

Staffing Plan

Child Trends overview

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