DEVELOPING PERFORMANCE CHARACTER AND MORAL CHARACTER:
4 KEYS*

I. A COMMUNITY THAT SUPPORTS AND CHALLENGES

(1) *Create a classroom environment that is simultaneously supportive and demanding.* Make the classroom safe for intellectual diversity, including the expression of unpopular or politically incorrect opinions. Use instructional practices such as well-designed cooperative learning that hold all class members accountable for high levels of engagement. In discussions of controversial material, require students to do the hard work of researching conflicting sides of any given issue so that multiple perspectives are fairly represented. Don't have students merely "clarify" their values; challenge them to develop more informed and principled ways of thinking.

(2) *As a community of educators—teachers, coaches, counselors, principals—take a strong stand for integrity in all phases of school life.* In every academic course and co-curricular activity, discuss with students how any form of cheating detracts from their education, integrity and self-respect, and the reputation of the school. Give students a leadership role in creating a school culture, including an honor code, where integrity is the norm.

(3) *Create an orientation program for new students.* Have current students welcome incoming students; discuss school traditions and norms regarding academic work, co-curricular activities, and how people treat each other; help new students understand and commit to the school's "way."

(4) *Create advisory groups* whose members support and challenge each other to set and pursue goals related to performance character (how can we help each other do our best work?), moral character (how can we help each other develop positive relationships in all areas of our lives?), and the 8 strengths of character (page 23)?

II. SELF-STUDY

(1) *Provide students with regular opportunities to self-assess and establish personal goals.* At strategic points throughout a course, have students reflect on particular character strengths required for success in that course (e.g., attention to detail, positive attitude, cooperation, perseverance, and courage), rate themselves on these strengths, and set goals for improvement.

(2) *Help students use self-monitoring tools to gauge progress toward their goals.* Have students keep a record of steps taken to improve in a particular academic subject or strength of character. Help them analyze their progress and revise their plans as needed.

(3) *Have all students, ideally in their freshman year, create a personal mission statement.* Have them define the person they hope to be and their emerging life goals. Have them consider performance character, such as goals they want to achieve, and moral character, including how they will make ethical decisions and treat others. Encourage them to continue to refine their mission statement throughout their high school years and beyond.

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* Many of these strategies are illustrated in subsequent chapters with examples from our research.

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(4) *Find time to have students regularly grapple with existential questions.* This can be done before class, at the end of class, at the beginning of the week, or at the end of the week through journal writing, essays, advisories, and other venues. Sample questions: "What is happiness?", "What is the meaning of life?", "What gives my life a sense of purpose?", "How am I developing my unique potential?"

III. OTHER STUDY

(1) *In history and literature classes, discuss moral and performance character as shown by historical and literary figures.* Consider, "What made them great?" "Was there a disparity between their performance character and moral character?" In math and science classes, highlight the performance character and moral character issues embedded in the content and reflected in the mathematicians and scientists. Study and discuss inventors and other entrepreneurs, considering aspects of their performance and moral character. For example, "What character traits helped them achieve what they did?" "What character flaws may have limited their contributions?"

(2) *Invite people of exemplary work ethic from a variety of work settings (carpenters, factory technicians, lawyers, business people) to discuss their work.* Ask, "What do you find satisfying?", "How do you approach difficult tasks?", and "What ethical issues do you face in the workplace?"

(3) *Provide students with opportunities to shadow and interview persons at work.* Have students write up their findings and discuss them in small groups, analyzing the performance character and moral character qualities required for success in the areas of work observed. Have them reflect on the alignment of their own character strengths with a given area of work (e.g., "What character strengths do I now possess that would help me succeed in this job?" "What character strengths do I need to develop?").

(4) *Invite graduates to come back to the school.* Ask graduates to speak in classes and/or an assembly about their experiences and the role that performance character and moral character have played in their lives. Help students become aware of the school's rich social and intellectual capital.

IV. PUBLIC PERFORMANCE

(1) *Provide regular opportunities for students to make their schoolwork public—to peers, the whole school, and the wider community.* In classroom settings, cultivate the skills and dispositions necessary for giving and receiving constructive critique. Coach students in how to present their work to classmates so that they describe the intended outcome (e.g., "Here's what I was trying to do in this essay"), the process (e.g., "Here's how I went about trying to achieve my desired outcome"), and the performance character qualities employed, strengthened, or in need of development (e.g., "I had good organization but found that I really need to work on maintaining a positive attitude when I run into a problem").

(2) *Provide many and varied opportunities for students to engage in community service and service-learning.* Have students discuss and then work on developing not only the moral character qualities (e.g., empathy, compassion, justice, and altruism) involved in service to others, but also the performance character qualities (e.g., organization, diligence, ingenuity, and perseverance) required to do service well. Whenever possible, integrate academic investigation of the topic so that students understand their service within a larger social-political context. For example, if students are working in a homeless shelter, study the political and economic dimensions of affordable housing.

(3) *Use public competitions to develop the knowledge, motivation, and skills of performance character and moral character.* Teach students to view competitions (e.g., choral, art, athletic) as opportunities to be challenged—by fellow competitors and by the task itself—as they pursue their personal best. Regularly reflect with students regarding the risks of competition (e.g., cheating to win, lack of respect for fellow competitors, lowered self-esteem if one loses); discuss the strengths of character (e.g., humility, perseverance, diligence, and focusing on best effort rather than just the outcome) required for being a good competitor.

(4) *Provide regular opportunities for simulated work or real work experiences.* Enable students to try their hand at different career opportunities and learn from experts in various fields. Have students present an "exhibition" (original research or creative work) before a panel that includes community experts; perform a "mock trial" in front of trial lawyers; fix a community member's car in the auto-tech shop; and so on.