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## Smart & Good Schools: A New Paradigm for High School Character Education

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Writing in the *Journal of Research in Character Education*, character education researcher and historian James Leming (2006) points out a paradox: On the one hand, a “motivating rationale” for contemporary character education has been adolescent behavior such as “suicide rates, teen violence, declining academic performance, increasing drug usage, and precocious sexual activity”; on the other hand, “to date general character education efforts have been primarily focused on elementary and middle school levels” (p. 83). Although character-related challenges are perceived to be greatest at the high school level, character education interventions have primarily targeted the elementary and middle school developmental levels.

Leming’s assessment that character education efforts “have made few inroads in high schools” (2006, p. 84) is corroborated by Berkowitz and Bier’s (2006) *What Works in Character Education*. In this monograph, thirty-three character education programs or strategies are identified that have demonstrated empirical effectiveness; the great majority of these approaches, they note, were developed for the elementary or middle school levels (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006). Since 1998, the Character Education Partnership has sponsored an annual National Schools of Character competition (c.f., Character Education Partnership, 2006); the ten schools named as winners each year are typically elementary schools, occasionally middle schools, and only rarely high schools; in fact, in the last two years of the program, no high schools were recognized as National Schools of Character (Character Education Partnership, 2005, 2006). Since the mid-1990s, approximately 5,000 school leaders and teachers from thirty-five states and sixteen countries have attended our annual Summer Institute in Character Education ([www.cortland.edu/character](http://www.cortland.edu/character)); a relatively small percentage of the total have been high school personnel.

If high schools do in fact have less interest in character education than elementary and middle schools, that phenomenon cannot be explained by lack of interest in school improvement. On the contrary, for more than a decade, strengthening high schools has been at the forefront of the national school reform debate. At least a dozen educational organizations are dedicated to promoting one or another high school reform model (c.f., National Research Council, 2006). Philanthropic groups such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation have poured extensive resources into promoting small learning communities, school connectedness, and other efforts to increase high school academic achievement, especially among historically underserved students (Vander Ark, 2005).

If problems such as underachievement, drop-outs, academic dishonesty, violence, drugs, and sexual activity are most pronounced in the high school years, why, then, have high schools not embraced character education as a central school improvement strategy? Leming offers as one reason the fact that “high school teachers tend to identify themselves as subject matter specialists and give less emphasis to character development than teachers in elementary and middle schools. High school teachers, when asked to define their professional focus, tend to say, ‘I teach history’ or some other subject area” (Leming, 2006, pp. 83–84). This tendency of high school educators to define their role as subject matter specialists is reinforced by the high-stakes testing environment created by No Child Left Behind (Berliner & Nichols, 2007). The upshot of all this: If academic achievement is the focus of high schools, they are likely to see character education as relevant only to the extent that it supports the academic mission, narrowly defined as teaching and learning the formal curriculum.

In the past, character educators have argued that by helping to create a safe, caring, and orderly school environment, character education creates the conditions conducive to teaching and learning and in that indirect way fosters academic achievement (e.g., Beland, 2003; Lickona, 2004; Schwartz, Beatty, & Dachnowicz, 2006). In fact, research by the Developmental Studies Center at the elementary level (Schaps, Watson, & Lewis, 1996) indicates that students’ sense of the school as a caring community is a mediating variable in a diverse range of important school outcomes, including reading comprehension and other academic indicators. However, once teachers have established a safe, caring, and orderly classroom, is there any other, more direct role for character development in fostering academic achievement? Do character strengths, for example, have an ongoing role in helping a student succeed at math, science, and writing, and if so, how? In our experience, high school teachers typically do not see character as contributing directly to academic learning because they tend to equate character education with “discussing ethics” or with “touchy-feely” social and emotional activities, which they view as peripheral to the demands of the academic curriculum. As one chemistry teacher told us, “I teach chemistry; I don’t teach character. Occasionally, I might touch on an ethical issue, but I don’t have a lot of time for that” (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, p. 27).

## OUR TWO-YEAR STUDY OF HIGH SCHOOLS

Our interest in how high school educators think about character education, what they currently do and don’t do (intentionally or unintentionally) to develop character, and what can be done to promote the wider implementation of character development practices in the adolescent years led us to undertake a two-year study of high school character education, *Smart & Good High Schools* (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). We began with the belief that the development of character is a worthy pursuit in its own right, not simply for the other desired outcomes it can bring to a school (e.g., academic achievement, school retention, etc.). We believe in the importance of character

in all phases of life. From this perspective, the most important goal of character education is to prepare all young people to lead a flourishing life. The work of the Search Institute (Scales, Benson, Leffert, & Blyth, 2000), and more recently the positive psychology movement (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) have emphasized the value of “asset-building,” identifying and developing those human strengths that enable us to become all we are capable of being. It was this broad purpose of character education—to help all young people maximize their potential for meaningful, fulfilling lives—that most deeply informed our study.

However, we also recognize a second legitimate purpose of character education: to help reduce the negative behaviors by which young people hurt themselves and society. Booker T. Washington asserted that “character is power”; we see character and culture as a largely untapped power source that can help to address a range of acute challenges facing schools and society. Indeed, character educators (e.g., Lickona, 1991, 2004; Lickona & Davidson, 2005) have long argued that the troubling behaviors we observe in young people—and in many of the adults who set the example for youth—have a common core: namely, the absence of good character. Developing good character offers the hope of striking at the root of anti-social or self-destructive behaviors and thereby helping to correct and prevent them. This line of argument has sometimes been referred to as the “instrumental” case for character education because it is being offered as a means of ameliorating social ills. But we view this as a legitimate and eminently practical purpose of character education at all developmental levels and especially in high schools, when problematic behaviors such as a lack of responsibility toward schoolwork, academic dishonesty, bullying, substance abuse, and sexual activity typically reach higher levels, as Leming (2006) has pointed out.

### Research Methodology

In carrying out our two-year study of “promising practices” in high school character education, we conducted a “grounded theory” research methodology (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994): (1) assembling a database of more than 1,400 books, research studies, reports and other materials on adolescent development, character education, and high school reform; (2) full-day site visits to each of twenty-four diverse, award-winning high schools—eighteen public and six private—in every geographical region of the country; (3) input and feedback from a National Experts Panel (thirty-two authorities on different aspects of adolescent development, character education, and high school reform) and a National Student Leaders Panel (one boy and one girl nominated by each school studied); and (4) supplemental interviews with other high school educators, parents, coaches, community members, and leaders of youth development programs. We established three criteria by which a practice could be considered “promising”: (1) research validation (for example, experimental research has found the practice to be effective, or to be related to a variable—such as sense of community—that has been shown to mediate positive character outcomes); (2) relevance to important adolescent outcomes (e.g., development as an ethical thinker) or important school outcomes (e.g., reduced discipline problems); and (3) the testimony of credible sources (e.g., an award for excellence from a credible educational organization such as the U.S. Department of Education or the Character Education Partnership). Most of the practices we identified as promising met the first of these criteria (research validation) in that they were directly or indirectly linked to a research base.

In the remainder of this chapter, we lay out some of the core constructs, relevant research, and illustrative practices that define our Smart & Good Schools framework. Our beginning premise is that throughout history, education rightly conceived has had two great goals—to help students become smart (in the multidimensional sense of intelligence) and to help them become good (in the multidimensional sense of moral maturity)—and that they need character for both.

### A NEW DEFINITION OF CHARACTER

The first major construct of our Smart & Good Schools model is its conception of human character as having two major parts: performance character and moral character. Our research has led us to propose a paradigm shift in the way we think about character and character education. We came to realize that character isn't just about "doing the right thing" in an ethical sense; it is also about doing our best work. If that is true, then character education isn't just about helping kids get along; it is also about teaching them to work hard, develop their talents, and aspire to excellence in every area of endeavor.

However, this broader conception of character education—as fostering best work as well as best ethical behavior—tends not to be reflected in media accounts of character education. For example, a newspaper article appeared in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* about character education under the headline, "Don't Lie, Don't Cheat, Be On Time" (Draper, 2006). The article quoted a state senator as saying, "I would call this 'golden rule education'" (Draper, 2006). The headline and the article conveyed the message that character is about doing the right thing ethically and *not* doing the wrong thing ethically. However, we would ask: Is it enough if students simply don't lie, cheat, and show up late? Is that enough to render character relevant to every high school in America? Is this vision of character a vision of human flourishing? What about the role of character in helping students to do their best work—to give their best effort in the classroom, on the athletic field, in the workplace, and in every area of their lives?

An expanded conception of character education as fostering best work as well as best ethical conduct requires an expanded conception of character. Based on our high school research, we propose a definition of character as having two essential and interconnected parts: *performance character* and *moral character* (depicted in the Figure 19.1 graphic below).

We describe performance character as a "mastery orientation." It consists of those qualities—including but not limited to diligence, perseverance, a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, ingenuity, and self-discipline—needed to realize one's potential for excellence in any performance environment, such as academics, extracurricular activities, the workplace, and throughout life. Moral character is a "relational orientation." It consists of those qualities—including but



FIGURE 19.1 Performance character and moral character

not limited to integrity, justice, caring, respect, and cooperation—needed for successful interpersonal relationships and ethical conduct. Moral character enables us to treat others—and ourselves—with respect and care and to act with integrity in our ethical lives. Moral character also has the important job of moderating our performance goals to honor the interests of others, to ensure that we do not violate moral values such as fairness, honesty, and caring in the pursuit of high performance.

## RESEARCH RELEVANT TO PERFORMANCE CHARACTER AND MORAL CHARACTER

Support for the importance of performance character and moral character comes from four sources: (1) research on lives of character; (2) research on talent development; (3) research on academic performance; and (4) the voices of teachers and students.

### Research on Lives of Character

If we examine lives of character, we invariably find both strong performance character and strong moral character at work. In their book, *Some Do Care: Contemporary Lives of Moral Commitment*, Colby and Damon (1992) profile twenty-three men and women of exemplary character, including religious leaders of different faiths, business leaders, physicians, teachers, heads of nonprofit organizations, and leaders of social movements. Their contributions spanned civil rights, the fight against poverty, medical care, education, philanthropy, the environment, peace, and religious freedom. Viewing these portraits of character through the lens of the performance character and moral character construct, one sees, again and again, the interplay of these two sides of character: high ethical goals combined with diligence and determination in the pursuit of those goals.

To take just one example: Colby and Damon describe the work of Cabel Brand, a businessman who over three decades developed a small family company into a multimillion dollar corporation. Motivated by his belief that “the weakness in our capitalistic democratic system is the number of people who don’t participate,” he launched a social action program in the Roanoke Valley called Total Action Against Poverty (TAP). TAP initiated one of the nation’s first Head Start programs; developed programs for high-school drop-outs, the elderly, ex-offenders, drug addicts, and the homeless; and created a food bank, a program to bring running water to rural people, economic development programs for impoverished urban areas, and community cultural centers.

Brand’s combination of drive, expertise, organizational skills, and concern for the welfare of others typifies the exemplars in this study. Colby and Damon’s book could have been titled, *Some Do Care—And Those Who Care Most Effectively Are Very Good At What They Do*. None of the noble accomplishments of these exemplars would have been possible without the synergistic contributions of performance character and moral character.

### Research on Talent Development

Studies of talent development show that performance character qualities such as self-discipline and good work habits are essential for developing innate ability. In their book *Talented Teenagers*, a five-year longitudinal study of 200 talented adolescents, Csikszentmihalyi, Rathunde, and Whalen (1993) begin by noting that underachievement on the part of talented youth is quite common in fields as varied as athletics, art, science, mathematics, and music. Why do some talented

teens develop their potential while other equally gifted peers do not? This study found that adolescents who were more successful in developing their talents were characterized by a stronger “achievement and endurance orientation” and habits conducive to talent development—such as focusing on goals whether doing talent-related work or general schoolwork, being able to spend time alone, and, when they did spend time with friends, collaborating on hobbies and studying instead of simply “hanging out.” Strong performance character was the distinguishing mark of teens who made the most of their talent potential.

Similarly, Ericsson (Ericsson, Charness, Feltovich, & Hoffman, 2006) investigated the origins of expert performance, utilizing performance statistics, biographical details, and their own laboratory expert experiments with high achievers. Based on their research, they argue that talent is generally overrated as a predictor of excellence, whereas deliberative practice (defined as setting specific goals, obtaining immediate feedback, and concentrating as much on technique as on outcome) is a much more powerful predictor. They assert that across a diverse sampling of fields, “stars”—expert performers—are made, not born. In other words, it is performance character, not simply talent that leads to expert performance. Narvaez and Lapsley (2005) reach parallel conclusions in their work on expertise.

### Research on Academic Performance

Given their focus on academic achievement, high schools will be especially interested in evidence that improvement in students’ performance character leads to improved academic performance. For example, Duckworth and Seligman (2006) sought to understand why throughout elementary, middle, and high school, girls earn higher grades than boys in all major subjects, in spite of the fact that boys outperform girls on measures of achievement (e.g., SAT, ACT, AP) and IQ. Previously, this performance difference was explained by gender differences favoring boys in these tests. However, using student measures of delayed gratification and self-report, as well as teacher and parent ratings, Duckworth and Seligman’s research (2006) identifies the character strength of self-discipline as giving girls the performance edge over boys.

There are multiple theoretical grounds for predicting this positive relationship between performance character (e.g., self-discipline) and higher academic performance. Educational, sociological, and social psychological theories of the learning process have long recognized student effort as central to student learning (e.g., Sørensen & Hallinan, 1977; Yair, 2000). In their book *Classroom Instruction That Works*, Marzano and colleagues (2001) report that students who believe that achievement is something they earn through effort, and not primarily the result of innate abilities, do best in school. Students’ academic effort and achievement are, in turn, enhanced by a school climate focused on excellence (Bryk, Lee, & Holland, 1993; Schouse, 1996). High school students who become more oriented toward excellence are more likely to choose advanced courses, which are likely to result in skills and credentials that students need to achieve success in college and in the labor market (Davenport et al., 1998; Kerckhoff, 1993). The kinds of courses students take do in fact predict academic achievement and college matriculation (Lukas, 1999; Stevenson, Schiller, & Schneider, 1994).

Moreover, when students’ development of performance character leads to their improved effort and quality of work, the classroom conditions for learning and teaching also improve. With more students focused on work and fewer distractions, teachers are able to devote more time to teaching content and working with individual students. A reciprocal expectations-obligations relationship tends to emerge between students and educators, with both sides feeling a stronger commitment to higher quality of teaching and learning (Coleman, 1988, 1990; Khmelkov & Power, 2000; Portes, 1998).

### The Voices of Teachers and Students

Wentzel (1997) asked middle school students, “How do you know when a teacher cares about you?” Students identified two behavior patterns as crucial: The teacher teaches well (makes class interesting, stays on task, stops to explain something if students don’t understand), and the teacher is respectful, honest, and fair (doesn’t embarrass, interrupt, ignore, or yell at students). In short, the teacher displays performance character and moral character—the integration of excellence and ethics. Even though the question asked of middle school students (i.e., “How do you know when a teacher *cares* about you?”) pulled for a moral character response, the student responses clearly demonstrate that they see care as a function of both moral character and performance character in their teachers. In the view of students, teachers “care” when they treat you with respect *and* demand excellence from you.

In our high school study (Lickona & Davidson, 2005), we observed that both teachers and students found performance character and moral character to be meaningful categories when reflecting on their experience of schooling. When we asked teachers what student attributes were necessary for academic success in their classroom, even teachers who did not at first self-identify as “character educators” described performance character qualities. They said students needed diligence, or commitment to doing a job or assignment well; perseverance in the face of difficulty; dependability, including the ability to do their part on a project; responsibility for having the required supplies or materials; orderliness in their work; the ability to set goals and monitor progress toward the realization of those goals. For example, the chemistry teacher we interviewed (who initially said, “I teach chemistry, not character”) explained that she emphasized many facets of “academic responsibility” (i.e., performance character) with her students:

I tell my students, “You’ll do better in this class if you keep an organized notebook. But it’s your responsibility to do that; I’m not going to check it. You’ll also do better on tests and in the course as a whole if you do the homework. But that’s your responsibility as well.” And I tell them that if they miss a class, a responsible student calls his or her lab partner to get the assignment.

At this point in the discussion, it is as if a light bulb goes on and practitioners say, “If *this* is what you mean by character education, then, yes, I’m a character educator. In fact, I spend much of my time and energy trying to get these outcomes, because without them, it’s unlikely that students will be able to succeed in this class.” “Performance character” thus gives high school educators a new character language for describing the academic endeavor of teaching and learning that is the focus of their daily work.

Of course, good high school teachers, as they develop performance character, also pay attention to moral character: how students treat the teacher, treat each other, care for classroom materials and equipment, honor expectations of honesty on tests and other work, and so on. “I run a classroom based on respect,” the above-quoted chemistry teacher said. The chair of the math department in this same high-performing school told her students, “Teaching and learning are based on a relationship. If you cheat, it damages our relationship. It creates a lack of trust between us.” Our point here is that defining character to give a prominent place to performance character as well as moral character profoundly alters how secondary-level educators see character education. Character development as the pursuit of excellence in learning, not just as the fostering of ethical behavior, is, for high school teachers, a “fit.”

We also found that high school students readily responded to questions about how persons and programs in their high school experience had impacted their performance character and moral character. Speaking about performance character, one girl said:

The person who has most profoundly affected my performance character is my basketball coach. During the first week of practice, Coach B. moved me from a wing player to a power forward—a position physically grueling and emotionally demanding for someone who is only 5'4". When I became frustrated in games, I would become upset quickly and use my height as an excuse. But Coach never allowed me to give up. He told me directly when he expected more from me, and he never forgot to mention when he was proud of me. Before playing for him, I had never been asked to do something so far out of my comfort zone—never had to persevere in the face of what I saw as an impossibility.

Speaking about moral character, a girl at another school said:

Everything about my school, from the peer-counseling program to the religious studies courses, tremendously influences the moral character of its students. We are taught from the very beginning that plagiarism and all forms of cheating are wrong, that any kind of cruelty toward other students is not to be tolerated, and that taking initiative and responsibility in all situations is required. We often have assemblies that discuss how to promote peace in society and issues that prevent such peace from being achieved. Graduation requirements include 100 hours of community service, but our school encourages us to do more. There is an unspoken expectation throughout the campus to do what is right and stand up for what is just.

In sum, performance character and moral character prove to be concepts that both teachers and students find useful in reflecting on the character dimensions of high school life.

To summarize our conceptualization of performance character and moral character, we offer the following propositions:

#### A Person of Character Embodies both Performance Character and Moral Character

Washington State University historian Richard Hooker (1996) notes that the Greek notion of *arête* is often translated as “virtue” but is actually better translated as “being the best you can be” or “reaching your highest human potential.” To become a person of character is to become the best person we can be—to develop our full human potential. Clearly, being the best person we can be includes doing our best work (performance character) as well as doing the right thing in our relationships (moral character).

#### Performance Character and Moral Character both Carry Obligation

Performance character, like moral character, has an ethical dimension; it is a moral failure, for example, when we do shoddy work. Green (1999) refers to this moral notion of performance as “conscience of craft.” He states: “To possess a conscience of craft is to have acquired the capacity for self-congratulation or deep self-satisfaction at something well done, shame at slovenly work, and even embarrassment at carelessness” (1999, p. 62). All of us have a responsibility to develop our talents, use them to enhance the lives of others, and give our best effort as we perform the large and small tasks of life (performance character). We have this obligation for two reasons: (1) respect for ourselves requires us not to waste our talents but to use them to develop as persons and to perform to the best of our ability in whatever we undertake; and (2) caring about others requires us to do our work well, since the quality of our work, especially in the world beyond school, affects the quality of other people’s lives. When we do our work well—whether as a parent, teacher, mechanic, or doctor—other people typically benefit; when we do it poorly, other people suffer. In a similar way, we have a responsibility to be our best ethical self (moral character)—both out of



self-respect and because our ethical conduct affects the lives of those around us. If we treat others with respect and caring, we contribute to their welfare and happiness; if we do the opposite, we demean them and subtract from the quality of their lives.

### In a Person of Character, Performance Character and Moral Character Support Each Other in an Integrated Way

In a person of character, the two sides of character are interdependent; each needs the other. Consider what can happen if we have performance character without moral character. We might choose selfish goals (such as making a lot of money that we spend only on ourselves) or even evil goals (such as blowing up innocent people). Or we might choose a good goal (such as doing well in school or fighting terrorism) but corrupt our pursuit of that goal by using unethical means to achieve it (such as plagiarizing papers or employing inhumane methods to interrogate suspected terrorists). Moral character is what motivates us to choose moral goals and then pursue them in a fully ethical way. Or, consider what happens if we have moral character without performance character. We might have good intentions but poor ability to execute them. We might want to help others—through a community service project, for example—but lack the confidence, organization, ingenuity, and perseverance to carry that out effectively. In this vision of the interdependence of performance character and moral character, excellence and ethics harmonize to make possible an act—or a life—of character.

## WHAT IS THE ROLE OF CHARACTER IN ACADEMICS?

Having argued the case for a concept of character that gives a central role to both performance character and moral character, we return to the question that has until now been difficult for character educators to answer: “What is the connection between character and academics?” We believe this question is easier to answer if we apply our expanded definition of character as comprised of performance character and moral character. From this theoretical perspective, one can identify four important roles for character in academic life (and work in general):

1. Students *need* performance character (work ethic, self-discipline, perseverance, initiative, teamwork, etc.) in order to do their best academic work.
2. Students *develop* their performance character (the ability to work hard, overcome obstacles, find joy in a job well done, etc.) from their schoolwork.
3. Students *need* moral character (respect, fairness, kindness, honesty, etc.) in order to create the classroom relationships that make for a positive learning environment.
4. Students *develop* moral character from their schoolwork (e.g., by helping their peers to do their best work through a “culture of critique” that offers constructive feedback, by studying ethical issues in the curriculum, and by using their curricular learning in service projects that help solve real-world problems).

In short, both performance character and moral character are *needed for* and *developed from* every area of academic work. Character is no longer the “other side of the report card” (i.e., “the ethical” or “social-emotional side”); it is “the whole report card” in that character is a foundation for, and a critical outcome of, all academic and ethical endeavors. The ethical and social-emotional outcomes of character education are not replaced or de-emphasized; instead, in this new paradigm, character is wrapped around every element of the formal and informal curriculum.

Schools no longer need to talk about “balancing academics and character education” as if there were a tension between the two. In the Smart & Good Schools paradigm, teaching academics and developing character are opposite sides of the same coin. Done effectively, they occur simultaneously in mutually supportive ways.

### EIGHT STRENGTHS OF CHARACTER (DEVELOPMENTAL OUTCOMES)

Although performance character and moral character increase character education’s relevance to the school’s academic mission, we believe these two major parts of character will be more practically useful to educators if they are defined in terms of specific strengths of character that can serve as target developmental outcomes. Our Smart & Good Schools framework proposes eight such strengths of character as the crucial outcomes of schooling: (1) lifelong learner and critical thinker; (2) diligent and capable performer; (3) socially and emotionally skilled person; (4) ethical thinker; (5) respectful and responsible moral agent; (6) self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle; (7) contributing community member and democratic citizen; and (8) spiritual person engaged in crafting a life of noble purpose (defined inclusively to encompass non-religious as well as religious world views and to focus on universally important existential questions such as “What is the meaning of life?” and “What is authentic happiness?”).

We see these Eight Strengths of Character not as narrow “traits” but rather as broad psychological assets needed for a flourishing life. (Table 19.1 describes each of these eight strengths in terms of what we see as their sub-components; empirical clarification of these constitutive components, as well as the factor analysis of the Eight Strengths themselves, is a focus of our current research.) The Eight Strengths are similar in some ways to the “internal developmental assets” that the Search Institute (Benson et al., 1998) has identified and found through its research to be strongly predictive of adolescent thriving. Our Eight Strengths of Character represent our best answer to a question that has long concerned educators: “What does it mean to educate the ‘whole person’?” The Eight Strengths are, we believe, the assets we need to develop our full human potential—“to be the best person we can be.”

We draw these Eight Strengths of Character from cross-cultural research on character, notably Peterson’s and Seligman’s *Character Strengths and Virtues* (2004); classical conceptions of a meaningful life (e.g., Frankel, 1959); positive psychology (Seligman, 2002); moral psychology (e.g., Blasi, 2004; Kohlberg, 1976; Lapsley, 1996); research on social-emotional learning (e.g., CASEL, 2002; Elias et al., 1997; Goleman, 1995); educational research (e.g., Marzano et al., 2001; Pallas, 2000); work on the development of purpose (e.g., Damon, Memon, & Bronk, 2003) and the role of spirituality in education (e.g., Kessler, 2000; Palmer, 1999); research on service learning (e.g., Billig, 2000); theory and research on intellectual character (e.g., Richhart, 2002; Sternberg, 1997); the input of our Experts Panel and Student Leaders Panel; and our own grounded theory research. The next phase of our research will be designed to empirically substantiate the existence and predictive power of these developmental outcomes.

Just as we see performance character and moral character as mutually supportive, we also see the Eight Strengths of Character as interdependent, each needed for the optimal functioning of the others. Being a diligent and capable performer, for example, affects how hard we work at developing all the other strengths of character. Consider, for example, the hard, persevering work it takes to become a socially and emotionally skilled person who listens well to others and can solve conflicts effectively. Being an ethical thinker—bringing discerning moral judgment to bear on every situation—guides how we live out all the other strengths. Being a self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle will clearly affect our ability to actualize all the other strengths

**TABLE 19.1**  
**Eight Strengths of Character: Assets Needed for a Flourishing Life**

- 
- 1. Lifelong learner and critical thinker**
    - Strives to acquire the knowledge that characterizes an educated person
    - Approaches learning as a lifelong process
    - Demonstrates skills of critical analysis
    - Takes seriously the perspectives of others
    - Seeks expert opinion and credible evidence
    - Makes connections and integrates knowledge
    - Generates alternative solutions
    - Demonstrates willingness to admit error and modify thinking.
  - 2. Diligent and capable performer**
    - Strives for excellence; gives best effort
    - Demonstrates initiative and self-discipline
    - Knows standards of quality and creates high-quality products; takes pride in work
    - Sets personal goals and assesses progress
    - Perseveres in the face of difficulty.
  - 3. Socially and emotionally skilled person**
    - Possesses a healthy self-confidence and a positive attitude
    - Demonstrates basic courtesy in social situations
    - Develops positive interpersonal relationships that include sensitivity to the feelings of others and the capacity for “care-frontation”
    - Communicates effectively
    - Works well with others
    - Resolves conflicts fairly
    - Demonstrates emotional intelligence, including self-knowledge and the ability to manage emotions.
  - 4. Ethical thinker**
    - Possesses moral discernment, including good judgment, moral reasoning, and ethical wisdom
    - Has a well-formed conscience, including a sense of obligation to do the right thing
    - Has a strong moral identity that is defined by one’s moral commitments
    - Possesses the moral competence, or know how, needed to translate discernment, conscience, and identity into effective moral behavior.
  - 5. Respectful and responsible moral agent committed to consistent moral action**
    - Respects the rights and dignity of all persons
    - Understands that respect includes the right of conscience to disagree respectfully with others’ beliefs or behaviors
    - Possesses a strong sense of personal efficacy and responsibility to do what’s right
    - Takes responsibility for mistakes
    - Accepts responsibility for setting a good example and being a positive influence
    - Develops and exercises capacity for moral leadership.
  - 6. Self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle**
    - Demonstrates self-control across a wide range of situations
    - Pursues physical, emotional, and mental health
    - Makes responsible personal choices that contribute to continuous self-development, a healthy lifestyle, and a positive future.
  - 7. Contributing community member and democratic citizen**
    - Contributes to family, classroom, school, and community
    - Demonstrates civic virtues and skills needed for participation in democratic processes
    - Appreciates the nation’s democratic heritage and democratic values
    - Demonstrates awareness of interdependence and a sense of responsibility to humanity.

*(continued)*

**8. Spiritual person crafting a life of noble purpose**

- Considers existential questions (“What is the meaning of life?”, “What is happiness?”, “What is the purpose of my life?”)
- Seeks a life of noble purpose
- Formulates life goals and ways to pursue them
- Cultivates an appreciation of transcendent values such as truth, beauty, and goodness
- Pursues authentic happiness
- Possesses a rich inner life
- Pursues deep, meaningful connections—e.g., to others, nature, or a higher power.

of character. As we grow as spiritual persons, deepening our sense of purpose in life, that process brings new energy and resolve to the development of the other strengths. And so on.

As the intended outcomes of a Smart & Good High School, the Eight Strengths of Character represent what we think is a needed expansion of character education theory, especially if it wishes to address the real-world challenges faced by high schools. Most previous approaches have defined desired character outcomes more narrowly. Moral education has focused on ethical thinking as the central developmental outcome at the high school level. The social and emotional learning field has viewed social and emotional skills as the major desired outcome. Civic education and service learning have seen democratic citizenship as the central goal, and so on. In reality, however, the varied academic and behavioral challenges faced by high schools and the short- and long-term outcomes society desires from high schools, require a more comprehensive character theory with a broader set of character outcomes. Without an adequate vision of end-goals, character education gets chopped into such small pieces as to have limited relevance to the array of acute challenges confronting high schools and society. We offer the Eight Strengths of Character as a set of developmental outcomes that we think are more commensurate with the need.

#### FOUR KEY STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT OF PERFORMANCE CHARACTER, MORAL CHARACTER, AND THE EIGHT STRENGTHS OF CHARACTER

In a Smart & Good School, how are performance character, moral character, and the Eight Strengths of Character developed? Most of our 227-page *Smart & Good High Schools* report (Lickona & Davidson, 2005) is devoted to describing nearly a hundred promising practices, culled from our research, for developing these outcomes. In our ongoing efforts to implement the Smart & Good Schools model, however, we have found a simpler “master strategy” emerging that can be applied to any of the Eight Strengths of Character and across different subject areas, co-curricular activities, advisories, remedial assistance, school and classroom discipline, and any other aspect of schooling. We call this overarching strategy the “4 KEYS for Developing Performance Character and Moral Character” (4 KEYS for short). The 4 KEYS are:

1. *The Ethical Learning Community (ELC)*—developing a community (classroom, advisory group, team, whole school) that both supports and challenges and whose members pursue the realization of their own potential for excellence and ethics *and* seek to bring out the best in every other person.
2. *Self-Study*—engaging students in assessing their strengths and areas for growth in performance character and moral character, setting goals for improvement, and monitoring their progress.

3. *Other-Study*—learning from exemplars of performance character and moral character by analyzing and emulating their pathways to success.
4. *Public Performance/Presentation*—using public performances and presentations as experiential learning and authentic assessment of students' performance character and moral character.

Let us illustrate each of these 4 KEYS to show their supporting research, diverse practical applications, and examples of how high schools and teachers have actually used them.

### The Ethical Learning Community (ELC)<sup>1</sup>

The first of the 4 KEYS, the Ethical Learning Community, recognizes that character develops in and through community, and that the norms of a community are a potent force in shaping character. Creating an Ethical Learning Community seeks to take character education beyond its focus on the psychological assets of the individual (the Eight Strengths of Character) to address the assets of the culture in which the individual lives and dwells, and where the psychological assets are developed. Focusing on creating an Ethical Learning Community fulfills Kohlberg's exhortation to "change the life of the school as well as the development of the individual" (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989). As Power and colleagues (Power et al., 1989) argue, "The teaching of justice, as the teaching of reading or arithmetic, is set in a context of a classroom and a school, and how the students experience the life of the classroom and school will have a shaping effect on what they learn from what the teacher teaches" (p. 20).

In attempting to map the human ecological system, Garbarino (1990) argues that the habitat of youth includes "family, friends, neighborhood, church, and school, as well as less immediate forces that constitute the social geography and climate (e.g., laws, institutions, and values), and the physical environment" (p. 78). In its largest dimensions, the Ethical Learning Community is an ecological system comprised of all the stakeholder groups that affect the culture of the school and the character development of its members. Those stakeholder groups include faculty and staff, students, parents, and the wider community. The ideal of an Ethical Learning Community is that all four of these groups will support and challenge each other in doing their best work (performance character) and being their best ethical selves (moral character). No one is exempt from the norms of excellence and ethics.

However, this "macro-ELC" is made up of many "micro-ELCs," such as individual classrooms, advisory groups, clubs, teams, and other groups. Any group, whatever its size, will maximize its potential for excellence and ethics if it functions as an Ethical Learning Community. In defining an Ethical Learning Community as a community that supports *and* challenges, we are advocating an environment where participation in the community means not simply "passing the put-up" (the "warm-fuzzy" stereotype of character education held by many high school educators) but constantly challenging each other to be the best persons we can be. In many ways, the Ethical Learning Community seeks to create what Vygotsky (1978) called a zone of proximal development, defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem-solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance or in collaboration with more capable peers" (p. 86). An Ethical Learning Community is a place where we intentionally and proactively structure opportunities for individuals to pursue their personal best through the assistance of teachers, parents, or peers.

Our theoretical model of the Ethical Learning Community (Lickona & Davidson, 2005) posits six principles by which any Ethical Learning Community is developed, sustained, and continuously improved. These six principles are: (1) develop shared purpose and identity; (2) align

practices with desired outcomes and relevant research; (3) have a voice; take a stand; (4) take personal responsibility for continuous self-development; (5) practice collective responsibility; and (6) grapple with the difficult issues that affect excellence and ethics. Each of these six principles is supported by our first-hand observation of award-winning high schools and also by relevant theory or research from our extensive database of empirical studies, theoretical books, reports on high school reform, and so on (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

For example, Principle 1: *Develop shared purpose and identity* draws on research on “school connectedness” as a predictor of adolescent flourishing (Resnick et al., 1997) and also on research on high-performing businesses and non-profits that used a “touchstone” (a creed that expressed core values) to promote excellence and ethical conduct in the way they carried out their work (Collins, 2001). Principle 3: *Have a voice; take a stand* draws on research on the experience of democratic school community as a predictor of adolescents’ use of their highest available moral reasoning (Power et al., 1989), reduced discipline problems (Freiberg, 1989), and civic participation after high school (Grady, 1994). Principle 5: *Practice collective responsibility* builds on research showing the power of positive peer pressure to influence the behavior even of previously anti-social youth, especially when coupled with direct instruction in perspective-taking and communication skills (e.g., Gibbs, 2003).

### Self-Study

The second of the 4 KEYS is Self-Study. In the Self-Study process, we are engaging students in assessing their strengths and areas for growth in performance character and moral character, setting goals for improvement, and monitoring their progress. Terman and colleagues (1959) found that intellectually gifted high school students who learned to set and pursue goals went on to achieve higher levels of success than equally gifted students who did not learn to set goals. The goal of Self-Study as a pedagogical strategy is student engagement and personalization; it seeks to move the locus of control from outside of the individual to inside the individual. With Self-Study we attempt to take the character words (posters, slogans, etc.) “off the wall” and to put them inside students’ hearts and minds. Through Self-Study, students have direct access to plan, monitor, and change their own behaviors.

In Csikszentmihalyi’s *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience* (1990), he provides insight into the importance of Self-Study. He describes “flow” as “deep concentration, high and balanced challenges and skills, a sense of control and satisfaction.” The experience of flow is one that Csikszentmihalyi identified in concert pianists, athletes, artists, factory workers, and others. He states that the requirements for flow include:

1. Setting an overall goal and as many sub-goals as realistically feasible;
2. Finding ways of measuring progress in terms of goals chosen;
3. Continuing concentrating on what one is doing in order to keep making finer and finer distinctions in the challenges involved in the activity;
4. Developing the skills necessary to interact with the opportunities available;
5. Raising the stakes if the activity becomes boring.

As we see it, the flow process described by Csikszentmihalyi is a prescription for Self-Study, a way to assist students in the development of a task orientation (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Nicholls, 1984, 1992). Like Csikszentmihalyi’s flow theory, the literature on achievement motivation helps us understand self-study and in particular the relation of self to others. This research suggests that an ego (or performance) orientation is one where a person is motivated to show competence in

relation to others by showing superiority (e.g., by winning, getting the most right, being able to list the most kind deeds one has done), whereas with a task (or learning) orientation, the person competes against self-referenced personal achievement (e.g., a better time than before, more right on this test than last time, fewer unnecessary interruptions of the class today than yesterday). In addition to facilitating numerous positive performance outcomes (academic, athletic, and other), a task orientation tends to promote self-reflection and awareness, to support strong intrinsic motivation, and to reduce helpless response to failure (Duda & Nicholls, 1992; Nicholls, 1984, 1992).

### Other-Study

Our third Key is Other-Study. With Other-Study we have students study people and products that exemplify performance character and moral character. From Other-Study, students learn the skills of analyzing and emulating the pathways to success. Other-Study builds upon social-cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1991). “Growing out of behaviorism, social learning theory focuses on the ways in which individuals learn from others and their surroundings—including the mechanisms of modeling, imitation, and social reinforcement” (Lapsley, 1996, p. 193). Social-cognitive learning theory, Bandura’s later version of the initial theory, attempted to capture the cognition involved in the imitation process. Bandura (1991) states:

Modeling is a dynamic constructive process. People do not passively absorb standards of conduct from whatever influences happen to impinge on them. Rather, they construct generic standards from the numerous evaluative rules that are prescribed, modeled, and taught. This process is complicated because those who serve as socialization influencers, whether designedly or unintentionally, often display inconsistencies between what they practice and what they preach. When these two sources of social influence conflict, example often outweighs the power of precept. (p. 54)

The Other-Study process helps students understand, internalize, and master the requisite skills for reproducing high levels of excellence and ethics in their own lives. As Green states: “We encounter the conscience of craft being formed whenever we observe the novice coming to adopt the standards of some craft as his or her own” (Green, 1999, p. 61).

Other-Study isn’t just a strategy for studying people as models; it also serves as a powerful model for studying products of excellence and ethics. For example, Berger (2003) argues for providing students with examples of beautiful, powerful, important work created by their fellow students or by professionals. He sees these models as providing inspiration for students—a standard to strive for. He states:

When my class begins a new project, a new venture, we begin with a taste of excellence.... We sit and we admire. We critique and discuss what makes the work powerful: what makes a piece of creative writing compelling and exciting; what makes a scientific or historical research project significant and stirring; what makes a novel mathematical solution so breath taking. (Berger, 2003, p. 31)

As a strategy for promoting excellence, studying products of excellence challenges students to ask: What does excellence look like, where does it come from, what does it take to create excellence in your own work? Questions like these have the potential to help students understand better how to develop their own performance character.

Schools can also use Other-Study by inviting successful graduates back to speak about the performance and moral character qualities that have helped them in their careers and in their lives. Teachers can have students analyze the character qualities, good and bad, of contemporary

and historical figures and how their strengths or shortcomings of character impacted their lives and the lives of others. Current events are a rich source of both positive and negative examples of character. Virtue in Action, an online current events resource for grades 6–12 ([www.virtuein-action.org](http://www.virtuein-action.org)), offers compelling in-the-news examples of integrity, compassion, and courage as well as instances of greed, disrespect, violence, and dishonesty. One Virtue in Action lesson, for example, featured Shirin Ebadi, the first Muslim woman and the first person from Iran to win the Nobel Peace Prize. After presenting a character exemplar such as Shirin Ebadi, the teacher would have students reflect on questions such as the following:

1. What strengths of character enabled this person to do what he or she did?
2. What obstacles did this person have to overcome?
3. What is one character strength possessed by this person that you would like to develop to a higher degree? Make a plan.

Contemporary and historical examples of man’s inhumanity to man can offer equally compelling forms of Other-Study. *Facing History and Ourselves* ([www.facing.org](http://www.facing.org)) is one of the thirty-three programs identified as having research validation by *What Works in Character Education* (Berkowitz & Bier, 2006). An evaluation of this curriculum showed gains in students’ moral reasoning and relationship maturity as well as reduced fighting and racist attitudes. Kohlberg argued, “The main experiential determinants of moral development seem to be amount and variety of social experience, the opportunity to take a number of roles and to encounter other perspectives.” Other-Study programs like *Facing History* clearly provide students opportunities for new roles and perspectives.

Regarding the influence of modeling, Lapsley (1996) argues that the “literature leaves little question that observing prosocial models can have powerful effects on children” (p. 193). He argues that prosocial models have been shown to enhance altruistic behavior, generosity, and resistance to temptation; further, he argues that the effects of modeling endure over time.

### Public Performance/Presentation

The last of the 4 KEYS is Public Performance/Presentation. Public Performance/Presentation functions pedagogically for us as both experiential learning (Kolb, 1983) and authentic assessment (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 1993) of students’ performance character and moral character. For example, service learning provides a public performance activity that provides students with a chance to “exercise” moral character as they serve others. It gives them an opportunity to practice moral character “in the real world.” A ten-year compilation of research on the impact of service learning indicates that it helps develop students’ sense of civic and social responsibility and citizenship skills, improves school climate, increases respect between teachers and students, and improves the interpersonal development and ability to relate to diverse groups (Billig, 2000).

In his book, *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a Culture of Craftsmanship with Students*, master teacher and master carpenter Ron Berger (2003) makes a strong case for the motivational power of presenting one’s work publicly. He points out that for most students, the audience for their work is an audience of one—the teacher. For many students, that is not audience enough; they don’t care if the teacher gives them a bad grade. More powerful, Berger says, is a classroom culture where students have to regularly present their work to their peers and where their peers expect them to do their best. Every student wants to fit in, and if the peer norm is to do your best work, students will strive to fit in to that culture.



Essential to creating this kind of classroom is what Berger calls “a culture of critique.” Students regularly share their work with the whole class, as the teacher guides the process. There are rules for critique: “Be kind; be specific; be helpful.” Students presenting a piece of work first explain their ideas or goals and state what they are seeking help with. Classmates begin with positive comments and phrase suggestions as questions: “Would you consider (e.g., adding X, deleting Y, changing Y, etc.)...?” The teacher uses the critique session as the optimal opportunity for teaching necessary concepts and skills. Following critique sessions, students have the opportunity to use the group feedback to do revisions, sometimes many revisions. Berger laments that in most schools, students turn in first drafts—work that doesn’t represent their best effort and that is typically discarded after it has been graded and returned. By contrast, in the workplace, where the quality of one’s work really matters, one almost never submits a first draft. An ethic of excellence requires revision.

Following revision, students present their work to a wider audience. *Every* final draft students complete is done for some kind of an outside audience—whether a class of kindergartners, parents, the whole school, the wider community, or the local or state government. In this kind of classroom, the teacher’s role is not as the sole judge of their work but rather similar to that of a sports coach or play director—helping them get their work ready for the public eye.

## CONCLUSION

We conclude our chapter with two quotes. The first is from Martin Luther King, Jr. On the evening before his assassination, King addressed the striking sanitation workers of Montgomery, Alabama, with these words:

You must discover what you are made for, and you must work indefatigably to achieve excellence in your field of endeavor. If you are called to be a street sweeper, you should sweep streets even as Michelangelo painted, or Beethoven composed music, or Shakespeare wrote poetry. You should sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven will pause to say, here lived a great street sweeper who did his job well.

The second quote is from a high school teacher we interviewed in our *Smart & Good High Schools* study. He commented:

Students today are growing up in a world where it seems okay to cheat to get ahead. When I find out about an incident of cheating in my class, I give a little talk to my students:

There are two roads in life: a high road and a low road. The high road is harder, but it takes you somewhere worth going. The low road is easy, but it’s circular—you eventually find yourself back where you started. If you cheat now, you’ll cheat later. Your life won’t get better—and *you* won’t get better—on the low road.

There are certainly many forces in human nature and in society that can influence young people to take the low road. But we believe that deep within every young person, there is also a desire to lead a flourishing life. It falls to us as parents and teachers to point out—and make accessible—the high road of character as the reliable pathway to a flourishing life. That high road includes both the summons to excellence of which King spoke and the call to ethical integrity of which the high school teacher spoke.

To prepare our young to lead flourishing lives, we therefore need a broader vision of character education than the one that has thus far guided the field. To date, the field has focused on ethics (moral character) while neglecting excellence (performance character). We need to view character education as the *intentional integration of excellence and ethics*—the systematic effort to develop performance character, moral character, and the Eight Strengths of Character through every phase of school life. The academic curriculum, school routines, rituals and traditions, discipline, co-curricular activities, service learning, and teachable moments all become opportunities to develop the full range of assets needed for an ethical, productive, and fulfilling life.

This broader definition of character education represents, we think, a paradigm shift for the field. We believe this is an essential paradigm shift for character education in high schools—because it makes character education directly relevant to the school’s central mission of teaching and learning.

#### NOTE

1. In the *Smart & Good High Schools* report, this key was originally referred to as, “Community that Supports and Challenges.”

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