

LEAD- ING A CHAR- ACTER- DRIVEN SCHOOL

BY ED BOYATT

At a staff meeting, in the midst of discussing budgets, insurance policies and discipline, one of the teachers spoke up, “Are we really focusing on the most important? We talk about a lot of things in faculty meeting, but little time is spent on the spiritual and character development of our kids.” We all sensed her frustration. And most of us agreed that the urgent often keeps us from dealing with the essential.

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Our Heritage

Our founders considered education absolutely essential. Ellen White’s *Education*, the manifesto for Adventist educators, emphasizes its character-building function:

True education does not ignore the value of scientific knowledge or literary acquirements; but above information it values power; above power, goodness; above intellectual acquirements, character. The world does not so much need men of great intellect as of noble character. It needs men in whom ability is controlled by steadfast principle.¹

Such an emphasis, she says, will produce students who are strong to think and to act, who are masters and not slaves of circumstances, who possess breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions. Such an education provides more than mental discipline and physical training. It strengthens the character.²

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What are superintendents, principals, and school boards doing to assure the primacy of character development in Adventist schools?

of character development in Adventist schools? Do our academic curriculum and standardized test scores taking precedence over service projects and character development? How can we ensure that successful character-education plans are implemented in our schools?

A character-driven school requires a visionary leader who gets things done. That is why leaders are evaluated by their accomplishments, not their promises. The following six principles will help leaders to successfully implement a character-development program.³

What Gets PICTURED Gets Done

As an academy principal, my day was largely spent on phone calls, in student conferences, committees, filling out paperwork, and teaching classes. What I did mostly was manage schedules and people. However, my professional reading and workshops challenged me to be a leader, not just a manager.

Authors and seminar speakers reminded me that managing is about *how*, while leading is about *what* and *why*. Management just supports the status quo, while leadership involves innovation and initiation. Leadership looks at the horizon and dreams of what could be. Management looks intently at the bottom line.⁴

Excellence in management leads to efficiency and good stewardship of time and resources. But Adventist education cannot settle for excellence in management. Visionary leadership creates a vision of what could be. It keeps the mission paramount, offering fresh visions of the relevance of redemptive education in a society that hungers for character over style, service over selfish ambition.

Leadership creates the vision. Principals must articulate this vision and use consensus-building strategies to develop the mission, goals, and expectations of the character-education program with the faculty and school board. A successful character-development plan will be clearly described by school leadership.

What Gets MODELED Gets Done

Educational leaders know that students learn more from what they see and feel than by what they hear and read. Values are caught more than taught.⁵ Since principals are the chief care-givers and role models in schools, they must under-

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stand the importance of relationships, community, and positive school climate in this modeling process. In fact, the way a school is run is the most important kind of character education that it can provide.⁶

Alfie Kohn believes the key ingredient in a character-education program is the establishment of a “caring community of learners.” If we want to help students grow into compassionate people, we have to change the way the traditional classroom

works and feels. Classrooms should be micro-communities where students feel cared about and are encouraged to care about one another, where they feel valued, respected, and connected to others. Growth occurs in a supportive, safe environment. Few things stifle learning like the fear of being judged or humiliated.⁷

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Within this morally rich community, teachers must understand the power of respect and rapport. When they have a warm and appropriately personal relationship with their pupils, it is easier for students to talk about their problems and to be receptive to moral guidance. A teacher’s ability to influence character is greatly diminished by a lack of good rapport.

I believe most Adventist teachers see their ministry as a special calling. Being a spiritual role model and mentor is the reason most of them chose the teaching profession. They wanted to make a difference in students’ lives, to teach them how to become more like Jesus.

What Gets TRAINED Gets Done

Leaders know from experience and research that school improvement plans must include ongoing staff development. Teachers need opportunities to learn more about character development. This includes knowledge about literature and research, effective teaching methods, and awareness visits to schools that model exemplary programs. (See Figure 1.)

After implementing a new emphasis in character education, leaders must provide time for teachers to come together to discuss progress, share common concerns, examine new information, and decide the content of future in-services.⁸

A leader who places a high priority on staff professional growth is a leader who reads. He or she models life-long learning by knowing the literature, visiting successful schools, and attending workshops. Since Adventist teachers and educational administrators should be specialists in character education, they should be acquainted with the professional organizations that are at the

Figure 1 EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION: UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES

The Character Education Partnership believes the following 11 principles to be foundational to an effective character education program:

1. It teaches core ethical values as the basis of good character.
2. Character is comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.
3. Character education is intentional, proactive, and central to the school’s mission.
4. The school is a caring community.
5. Students have frequent opportunities for moral action.
6. Character development and learning are inseparable.
7. It develops intrinsic motivation and commitment to do what is right.
8. The entire school staff shares responsibility for character education and models core values.
9. Leaders champion the program.
10. Parents and community are full partners.
11. Assessments are made of school climate, staff’s role, and character development of students.

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(From DeRoche and Williams, pp. 122-129)

forefront of the character-education movement in North America. (See Figure 2.)

What Gets TAUGHT Gets Done

Instructional leadership is the most neglected role of today's Adventist principal.

Every principal is truly a "head teacher," and should know about the effectiveness of various instructional models. Such experts will recognize that sermonizing (worships) comprises the main (and often the only) thrust of the character-education program in most Adventist schools. But this "telling and compelling" model brings little change in student behavior.⁹ An effective character-education plan should not be a collection of exhortations or extrinsic

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inducements, but should center upon building a thinking community of learners, while integrating character principles throughout the curriculum.¹⁰ The instructional program must embrace a comprehensive definition of character that includes thinking, emotions, and behavior. (See Figure 3.)

In his landmark book, *The Basic School*, Ernest Boyer presents four building blocks of the model elementary school: community, curriculum coherence, climate, and character. *Connections* is the single word that best describes the most essential ingredient of this ideal school. An effective school connects people in order to create community; it connects and integrates the curriculum to achieve coherence; it connects classrooms and resources to enrich the learning climate; and it connects all learning to life and character building.¹¹

Both the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Boyer believe that the entire school experience must be character building. And character is best taught through an integrated curriculum, school climate, and service learning.¹² Adventist educators must apply values and virtues across the entire curriculum. Character should not be taught in isolation, but be infused

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throughout every school activity. Teaching plans should include lessons on values such as responsibility, respect, cooperation, honesty, or determination. Character education is not an add-on; it is integral to education.

Figure 2 CHARACTER EDUCATION ORGANIZATIONS

Center for the Advancement of Ethics and Character
Boston University
605 Commonwealth Avenue
Boston, MA 02215
(617) 353-3262

Center for Character Education
Duquesne University, School of Education
Pittsburgh, PA 15282
(412) 434-5191

Center for the Fourth and Fifth R's (Respect/Responsibility)
S.U.N.Y., Cortland, Education Department
P.O. Box 2000
Cortland, NY 13045
(607) 753-2456

Child Development Project
Developmental Studies Center
2000 Embarcadero, Suite 305
Oakland, CA 94606
(510) 533-0213

Jefferson Center for Character Education
2700 East Foothill Boulevard, Suite 302
Pasadena, CA 91107
(818) 792-8130

Josephson Institute of Ethics
4640 Admiralty Way, #1000
Marina Del Rey, CA 90292-6610

Quest International
1984 Coffman Road
P.O. Box 4850
Newark, OH 43058-4850
(800) 446-2700

The Character Education Partnership
(a nonpartisan coalition of individuals and organizations)
918 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20006
(202) 296-7743

(From DeRoche and Williams, pp. 169-174)

A character-driven school requires a visionary leader who gets things done.

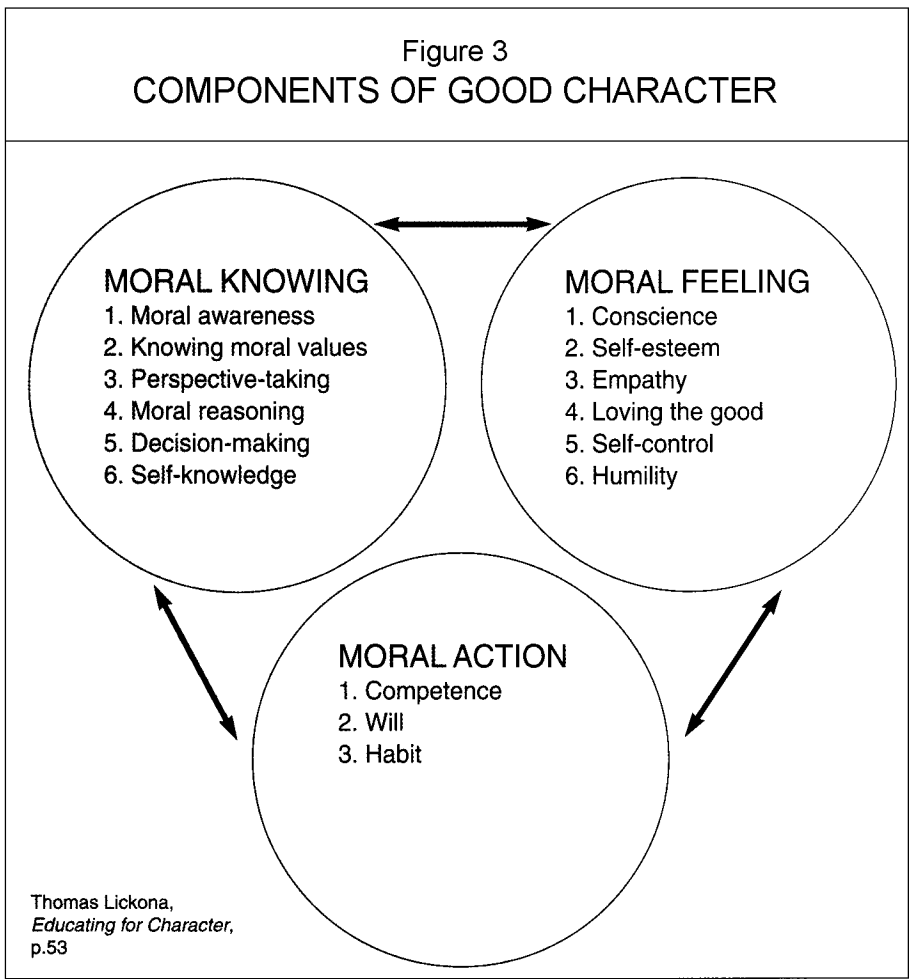
Like the Carnegie Foundation, Adventist educators need to see service learning as an important part of character education. It is our response to God's saving act. God's grace in our life spontaneously inspires us to help others. Character education doesn't occur without service, since service is God's method of furthering our character development.¹³

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What Gets MEASURED Gets Done

Many educators believe that test scores have become the tail that wags the educational dog.¹⁴ Standardized achievement test scores are often featured in school publications and reported to a constituency that has high expectations about student achievement.

But for Adventist educators, academic progress is only one component of a student's wholeness. Realizing that physical, social, and spiritual dimensions deserve similar attention, the Oregon Conference administers the Valuegenesis Survey biannually.



Coordinated by the John Hancock Center for Youth and Family Ministry at La Sierra University, in Riverside, California, this quality character/values assessment tool measures specific behaviors as well as attitudes toward Christian character traits, church standards, and fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.¹⁵ We recommend that all Adventist school districts profile their students' beliefs, values, and behaviors, using several assessments. The findings will motivate you to improve your flat spots, while giving you encouragement as your students grow in spiritual maturity.

Another current assessment method that is gaining teacher interest is "action research." In action research, teachers create their own research plans using homemade instruments. This may include perception surveys, checklists, polls, and questionnaires that provide useful data to refine teaching methods. Other useful assessment methods are journals, logs, anecdotes, interviews, and focus groups.¹⁶ The bottom line is that church leaders assess how we are doing and communicate their impressions to the constituency. We must not allow standardized academic tests to dominate the publicity, thus making students, parents, and church members believe that cognitive growth is our most important product.

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coaches teachers as they integrate the principles of Christlikeness across the curriculum, with an emphasis on service learning.

If school leadership implements the components of “how things get done,” we will affirm our mission of being Bible-based, Christ-centered, character-driven and service-oriented. *Bible-based* because we discover God’s character and His will for our life in His Word. *Christ-centered* in that our primary aim is to lead students into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ. *Character-driven* in that Christians will ever seek ways to be more like Jesus. And *service-oriented* because both our immediate and ultimate aim is to serve God and others. ☞

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16. DeRoche, p. 118.
17. White, p. 30.

What Gets FINANCED Gets Done

The school budget is the financial master plan for your educational program. What place does character education occupy in your budget?

For example, since standardized testing is a priority, it is funded in most Adventist schools. Can that line item be increased to include the Valuegenesis survey? Do your professional growth and substitute teacher line items include monies for teacher planning and workshop attendance in the areas of values and service learning?

If you have a large school, do you hire someone to coordinate outreach and service activities? In small schools, is there a budget for a parent volunteer to make community service a reality? Since service learning has a powerful long-term impact on students’ behavior and attitudes, resources must be in place to make it happen.

In Summary

Our first effort and constant aim in Adventist education must be Christ-centeredness and character development. This mission is articulated by Ellen White when she states,

*The great principles of education are unchanged . . . for they are the principles of the character of God. To aid the student in comprehending these principles, and in entering into that relation with Christ which will make them a controlling power in the life, should be the teacher’s first effort and his constant aim.*¹⁷

The school principal is the single most important person in creating the essential conditions for character education. The principal creates the vision, facilitates a positive moral school climate, provides time and budget for staff development, and

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Ed Boyatt has just assumed the position of Associate Professor of Education at La Sierra University in Riverside, California. He has served as a secondary teacher, academy principal, college dean of students, and most recently was Superintendent of Education at the Oregon Conference in Clackamas, Oregon. Dr. Boyatt is the coordinator for this issue. The editors express their appreciation for his cooperation, advice, and the many hours he devoted to planning, writing, and reviewing materials for the issue.