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CHAPTER FIVE

LEADING SCHOOLS OF CHARACTER



MARVIN W. BERKOWITZ

The title of this volume, *Leadership for Social Justice and Democracy in Our Schools*, can have two connotations. The first is that we want school leaders who create schools that are just and democratic, i.e., schools where all stakeholders treat each other fairly and make ethical decisions, and that those decisions are made in a collaborative, democratic fashion. The second is that we want leaders who create schools that promote the development of justice and democratic knowledge, skills, and dispositions in their students. Fortunately, these two interpretations are inextricably intertwined; i.e., creating fair and democratic schools promotes the development of justice and democratic competencies and proclivities in students who attend such schools (Dewey, 1909). When I worked in Lawrence Kohlberg's Just Community Schools (Power, Higgins, & Kohlberg, 1989), in the late 1970s, that is precisely what we were doing. The Just Community Schools model was designed to create democratic schools in which the democratic process was always directed toward decisions that promoted both a sense of community and just processes. While such schools are ambitious and only infrequently established, they point directly to the impact of living in a fair and

democratic community on the moral development of the members of that community.

In this chapter, I will take a more focused look at the role of school leadership in both transforming schools into the types of institutions where democratic decision making flourishes and, consequently,

where students develop moral and civic character. In doing so, I will not focus exclusively on those outcomes, but rather will take a more global perspective on the aspects of school leaders and leadership that nurture the transformation of schools into what we

will call “schools of character.” First, I will make certain premises explicit and then will define some key terms.

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PREMISES

The first premise is that *the best way to make a more just and caring world is to make more just and caring people*. As a developmental psychologist, I generally embrace the anonymous statement that “a child is the only known substance from which a responsible adult can be made.” If we want a more moral world, then we need more moral people, and the best way to get more moral people is to invest in the parenting, education, and general socialization of children.

The second premise is that *schools can, should, and inevitably will shape the development of students*. Throughout this chapter, I will be relying upon and therefore introducing the reader to a series of exemplary school leaders in order to concretize the points I will be making. So let me now introduce the first of them. Avis Glaze recently retired as Ontario’s (Canada) first Chief Student Achievement Officer and founding CEO of the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat. She was also charged with designing and implementing character education for the approximately 5,000 schools in the Province of Ontario, which ranged from small Inuit schools near the Arctic Circle to large, widely diverse urban schools in Toronto. Prior to this job, she served as a teacher, counselor, school administrator, and district administrator. Her

successes in both academic achievement (including reducing the achievement gap) and character development have led to multiple recognitions for both her and Ontario education. One thing she taught me (among many) is something she frequently tells educators: “We [in the field of education] are in the business of enhancing the life chances of our students, and influencing people, communities, and organizations.”

Unlike Avis Glaze, I am not an educator (despite being an endowed professor of education and having taught college students for nearly 40 years). Rather, my training is as a developmental psychologist. I have found this to be invaluable as I work with teachers and administrators. I see schools through the lens of how they impact the development of children. James Comer (1999), a pioneer in developmentally informed school reform, has opined,

The responsibility of every society is to provide children with adults and with institutions that can help them develop and learn. . . . With such help they will have a reasonable chance to meet their adult tasks. . . . Nonetheless, many in the modern school reform movement are concerned about issues of power . . . ; test scores; and what parents, teachers, administrators, politicians want—not what children need to grow, develop, and meet their adult tasks and responsibilities. (p. xx)

If we truly want schools that contribute meaningfully to the socialization of the next generation of ethical, democratic citizens, then we have to look through the lens of child development, as we are, after all, in the business of changing people.

The third premise is that *the changes schools make in students cannot and should not be limited to the intellectual and academic; rather, they will and should encompass the moral and civic development of students*. In acknowledging that schools must focus on intellectual growth, Dewey (1909) argued that “it is not out of the question to aim at making the methods of learning . . . such that they will render behavior more enlightened,” by which he means more moral (p. 3). For Dewey, the school has a fundamental moral purpose, and morality entails that which will “take effect in conduct and improve it, make it better than it otherwise would be” (p. 1). Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) explicitly echoed Dewey in

their paper entitled “Development as the Aim of Education: The Dewey view.” Changing people, specifically students in schools, must and will inevitably entail impacting their moral growth, i.e., the development of their moral and civic character.

The fourth premise is that *for schools to optimally impact the development of student character (both moral and civic), they must be moral and democratic institutions.* Durkheim (1961) argued that (1) society needs schools to foster the moral development of students for the very survival of society, and (2) to do this, schools have to promote both a sense of community and democratic processes. Dewey (1909) has similarly argued that “to an extent characteristic of no other institution, save that of the state itself, the school has the power to modify the social order” (p. v). This dual refrain, that schooling is necessarily a moral endeavor and the moral nature of schools (their culture and climate, their hidden curricula, etc.) directly impacts the moral development of students, is a long-standing and widely accepted one (e.g., Boyer, 1995; Feinberg, 1990; Jackson, Boostrom, & Hansen, 1993; Power et al., 1989; Sizer & Sizer, 1999; Sockett, 1993).

The fifth and final premise is that *for schools to become the kinds of moral and democratic institutions that promote the development of students, they need leaders who understand, prioritize, and have the leadership competencies to nurture such institutional growth.* This will indeed be the focus of the bulk of this chapter. It is critical that school leaders further understand and embrace the fact that student development is a core goal, that school development is necessary for student development to be optimized, and that the personal and professional development of the leader is necessary for both of these to happen. In other words, as Wagner and Kegan (2006) have argued, “transforming organizations . . . requires very different kinds of leaders—ones who recognize that they, as individuals, may have to change in order to lead the necessary organizational changes” (p. 11). This requires courage, insight, and altruism. Brenda Logan, former principal at Hazelwood Elementary School in Louisville, Kentucky, said that she started thinking that all that needed to change was students, “but my big ‘aha’ was when it hit me that reform means many different types of changes, one of which might be to change or alter my own behavior and the possible

impact on the behavior of the staff” (personal communication, 2010). This is a daunting revelation to many educators who dip their toes in the turgid waters of comprehensive school reform.

MAPPING THE TERRAIN

Character education is comprehensive school reform that supports both academic achievement and positive student development. When I use the term *character education*, I am using it broadly to include related terms like positive psychology, prosocial education, and social-emotional learning. In doing so, I will use the following definition: “[C]haracter education . . . is the process of intentionally fostering . . . the composite of those characteristics of the individual that directly motivate and enable him or her to act as a moral agent, that is, to do the right thing” (Berkowitz & Puka, 2009, p. 109). Furthermore, this view of character education is fundamentally based in changing the entire culture, and consequently many of the practices, of a school. It therefore makes sense that the principal in a school is the centerpiece of character education’s quality and success.

Before we proceed much further, we need to spend a little time talking about what counts as school leadership. When asked to do presentations or workshops on educational leadership, I have learned to ask what the person or organization inviting me means by leadership in an educational context. I have found the following meanings are the most common ones intended:

- School (or district) administration
- Teacher leadership
- Student leadership

And I have discovered that educators (and others interested in educational leadership) often conflate these leadership variations.

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What it takes to get students to develop leadership competencies and values is quite different from what a school principal needs to do in order to effectively act as a leader, for example. In this chapter, I am concerned only with the school administration (although almost all of what I will say also applies to district administration), and in this regard I am mostly concerned with the lead principal of the school.

This chapter will essentially be an examination of the characteristics of principals who can most effectively lead the comprehensive school reform process of shepherding the evolution of a school into a true “school of character”: a school that promotes the sustained development of those inclinations and capacities of an effective moral agent, one who regularly “does good” in the world, including the desire and capacity to act as a democratic citizen. It is worth reiterating that such schools also produce higher levels of academic achievement (Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, & Smith, 2003; Berkowitz & Bier, 2005; Payton et al., 2008). Essentially, good character education is good education, and good character education leadership is good school leadership.

THE CONTEXT

My current position is an endowed chair in character education and part of the regional Des Lee Collaborative Vision (DLCV). The DLCV is a broadly interdisciplinary network of endowed professors in the St. Louis region. Each professor has one foot in the academy and one foot in the community, with the obligation to link the two in order to serve disadvantaged youth.

My community partner is CHARACTERplus, a professional development division of the Cooperating School Districts of St. Louis. Within CHARACTERplus, I spend the majority of my time working with the Leadership Academy in Character Education (LACE). LACE is a complex professional development experience, entailing (in part) monthly full-day meetings and monthly written assignments as the core of a yearlong curriculum that systematically builds a site-specific implementation plan.

These assignments are strategic thought experiments and implementation steps designed to move the participant (the school leader) to both deeper understanding and better practice.

Each assignment is read either by me or my assistant and detailed written feedback is provided. The feedback is designed to both affirm and to challenge the participant, in a form of written mentoring. A cycle of collaborative site-based reflection and brainstorming generates the report, to which we respond with detailed written constructive feedback.

It is through this process that I have watched hundreds of school leaders grapple with the meaning of character education, with understanding what a truly great school entails, and with facing their own strengths and weaknesses as school leaders. Furthermore, I have watched many of these principals continue to lead their schools through lengthy and successful reform processes, and of course I have watched others not try and yet others try and not succeed. This, then, is the context in which I will present key issues in leading schools of character.

A WORD ABOUT OUTCOMES

As the accountability movement in education has taught us, good education demands a clear understanding of the outcome goals of education before we can ever begin to talk about pedagogy. It is no different in character education. Enthusiastic school leaders often surge forward in designing their character education initiatives without spending the time to consider what those initiatives are intended to promote. Or they have a clear set of outcomes but the methods they adopt are not aligned with those outcomes. For example, one principal approached me quite enthusiastically and announced, “Marvin, I just have to tell you about our new character education initiative!” When I encouraged him, he said he first wanted to tell me what instigated this new initiative. Apparently, they had uncovered a significant amount of cheating in his high school and upon looking at national research (e.g., McCabe, 1999), realized that they had likely had their heads in the sand on this national epidemic. When I lauded him on using this “teachable moment” as a presenting symptom to spur school reform, he proudly announced how they were implementing character education. “Service-learning. It is going to be school-wide and across the curriculum, and we are investing heavily in professional development to support it.” So I said to him, “That

is wonderful. Service-learning is a great academic and character education method, with solid research to support its impact on academic achievement and various aspects of character development. And investing in your staff and their expertise is great leadership. But I have one question. What on earth does service-learning have to do with academic integrity?" He was stunned. They had never even considered whether the implementation strategy (service-learning) was aligned with (would lead to) their targeted outcome (academic integrity).

Schools need to start at the end, i.e., with the desired outcomes. One way I have addressed this when consulting with schools is to ask the question, "If your school was wildly successful at promoting character education, and if students entered your school at the earliest grade level and stayed until the latest grade level, what would be different about them as a direct result of your character education initiative?" This usually engenders great reflective discussions and more enlightened goals. When such goals are specific and developmentally relevant, then the basis is there for building an initiative, which should include a strong consideration of both (1) developmental processes for the selected outcomes and (2) research-based and aligned effective methods that build upon those developmental principles. In essence this is a "logic model," in other words, an articulation and justification of the logical connections among goals, methods, and assessment.

"GETTING IT": THE PRINCIPAL'S FOUNDATION

As already noted, effective school-based character education starts with the principal. That does not mean someone else cannot be the catalyst for character-focused school reform. Of course, when we look at a school district, then the superintendent is the analogous lead person. For example, Sheldon Berman led the Hudson Public School District (MA) to recognition as, at that time, only the third National District of Character in 2001. For him, the fundamental purpose of schooling was (and is, as he is now the superintendent of the Jefferson County Public Schools, KY) the development of social responsibility, democratic citizenship, and moral character of students (Berman, 1997). He articulated his

vision and worked strategically to put the human and other resources in place to focus his district on this goal. He even went so far as to have his new high school architecturally designed to accommodate democratic deliberation among students, service-learning, and his broader mission. Matt Klosterman, current superintendent, and Bill Porzukowiak, former assistant superintendent, of the Belleville (IL) 118 School District, made a strategic decision that building and district leadership was critical to school improvement in general and character education in particular. Over the past decade, they have strategically sent every school and district administrator through LACE. They have been recognized by the State of Illinois for academic achievement, especially reducing the achievement gap, and have twice been named a finalist as a National District of Character.

One exercise I do with principals is to ask them first if they can tell me their mission statements verbatim. In the vast majority of cases, they cannot. As part of my yearlong academy (LACE), I ask them to write up their school and district mission, vision, and values statements, and to deconstruct them for how adequately they prioritize character development as a school or district outcome goal. Usually, there is little that is of direct and explicit relevance to character development and education. Some talk exclusively about academic achievement. For example, the mission of the St. Louis Public Schools is "We will provide a quality education for all students and enable them to realize their full intellectual potential." Their vision is "St. Louis Public Schools is the district of choice for families in the St. Louis region that provides a world-class education and is nationally recognized as a leader in student achievement and teacher quality." Others have tangentially related concepts like "lifelong learners" or "productive citizens," and think that specifically alludes to character development. One district recently adopted the mission statement that "we do whatever it takes to ensure all students realize their potential" and a vision that "by continuously improving in every aspect of our performance, the . . . District empowers students to command their future." Many of the schools in the district are adopting the district mission as a school mission. The principals of those schools tend to think the mission and vision statements represent character as a priority. Unfortunately, they do not. Realizing one's "potential" is not

normative; one might have potential to be a great assassin or to cure cancer. Commanding one's future suffers from the same problem. From an ethical standpoint, not only is there no normative concept in either of these statements, but the opening phrase "we do whatever it takes" is a complete violation of the ethical principle that the ends do not justify the means. The real point here, however, is that principals (and other educators) usually do not even see the lack of prioritization in their own mission and vision statements.

The LACE exercise to deconstruct the statements typically requires two steps before the principals "get it." First, they present and, sometimes, reflect on the statements, but they do not see the lack of prioritization. Second, we provide constructive feedback and ask them to collaboratively reflect on our feedback with their character education leadership team. At this point, they are much more likely to begin to "get it." Underlying this malaise is the fact that most school leaders do not have a clear mission or vision for their schools. One principal countered this by actually writing up his educational philosophy and distributed it widely, not only to staff, but to parents and others. In fact, he sent it in advance to every job applicant so they would know the kind of school he was trying to lead. For most leaders, however, developing and articulating a mission, vision, educational philosophy, or long-term strategic plan is an unrealized but critical leadership task.

Karen Smith became principal of Mark Twain Elementary School in Brentwood, Missouri, in 2002. She had a long-term strategic plan, in part building upon her success at her previous school. She began with her staff: "[W]e began implementation in 2003–2004 with staff self-reflections." This was coupled with professional development. The next year, they joined a group of schools implementing Caring School Communities under the auspices of CHARACTERplus. Then, in the following year, they focused on family involvement ("parents were my biggest challenge in those early years") and service programs. In other words, this was a systematic long-term strategy. As Karen describes it, "we like little steps that are designed to institutionalize effective change!" As with the other exemplary schools cited in this chapter, the proof is clear. For example, their percentage of students scoring at the proficient or advanced level increased from 30 in 2005 to 75 in 2009. From 2003–2010, discipline referrals

dropped by 79%, the number of students referred for discipline dropped by 77%, and bullying referrals dropped by over 75%. According to Karen, "The use of student self-reflection for inappropriate behaviors and natural consequences accounts for most of this change" (personal communication, 2010).

So, for most principals, at some point a light bulb has to go on as they "get it," i.e., as they recognize in a detailed and informed manner that the development of character of their students is a prime purpose of schooling, and that they, as the school leaders, have to be at the helm of that journey. I have seen this epiphany happen in many ways and for quite different reasons. Karen Smith was looking for a way to increase academic achievement at her previous school, Clearview Elementary in Washington, Missouri, and attended a presentation by the Developmental Studies Center about their Child Development Program. She came to realize that focusing on school climate and character might be the path to her academic goal, so she applied to LACE. What she learned was applied at Clearview and then at her subsequent school, Mark Twain Elementary, which has since been recognized as a Blue Ribbon School and a Missouri School of Character.

From a different angle, Amy Johnston, a highly accomplished middle school principal, felt that something was missing from making her job as head of a large suburban middle school fulfill the reasons she first entered the profession of education. She claims that an application for LACE mysteriously appeared on her desk and she decided to apply. LACE provided the vision for what a great school should be and lit a fire under her that has led to recognition of Francis Howell Middle School (St. Charles, MO) as a National School of Character and winner of the Partnership School Award, and their achievement scores have skyrocketed (e.g., 67% reduction in F grades from 2004 to 2010; state math scores are 25% higher and communication arts scores are 17% higher than the other four middle schools in the same district) while their misbehavior data have plummeted (e.g., in a school of

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approximately 850 students, detentions decreased from 1,153 in 2003 to 203 in 2010). These cases exemplify the two most common motivations to embrace quality character education, i.e., either because it is a means to greater and more robust academic success, or because it is fundamental to the mission of a school and an educator. School leaders need to “get” one or ideally both of these. Finding ways to help educators “get it” is so fundamental to my work as an educational consultant that I often think my title should be “Epiphany Engineer.”

LEADING THE CHARGE: MAKING CHARACTER EDUCATION AN INSTITUTIONAL PRIORITY

No school reform initiative can thrive without the principal as its champion, and no successful initiative is principal-proof. An antagonistic principal can undo or at least do sustained damage to such an initiative. Character education needs a champion at the helm of the school. The Healthy School Communities initiative of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD, 2010) has recently concluded that “the role of the principal was the most critical piece of the puzzle in implementing meaningful school change and school improvement” (p. 1) and that “planning teams should be principal-led” (p. 4). As Mark Eichenlaub, former principal of Jefferson Elementary in Belleville, IL (a National School of Character), said, “This is obvious for all of us, as building leaders: We were responsible for keeping the ship headed in the right direction. Never backing off what was best for kids set the tone for all activities.” The question then is how do principals show commitment to and prioritization of character education?

ASCD (2010) has suggested one such means: serving on or, better yet, leading the school reform team. The first LACE assignment is to assemble a representative stakeholder character education team in the school. We urge the principal to serve on it and, when appropriate, to lead it. We also suggest that it be the overall school culture, school climate, and school improvement team. Putting character education in the driver’s seat of school reform and seeing the principal actively engaged in this is one way to demonstrate its importance. I have (and many of you

likely have as well) experienced failures in such leadership. I recall being invited by a lead teacher to present an after-school workshop in an urban high school some years back. It was my first visit to this school and I knew none of the staff. Apparently, I was to be part of the regular staff meeting. The principal first took care of some minor business, then introduced me . . . and left! My heart sank as I knew that my impact had just been severely compromised by the symbolic (and likely actual) disrespect of character education by the principal’s glaring departure. Presence and participation speak loudly as indicators of a principal’s commitment.

It is worth inserting a cautionary dichotomy here. I have discovered that there are two basic forms of delegation: authentic and inauthentic. Authentic delegation happens when a principal assigns the leadership authority to another. There are two core ingredients to authentic delegation. First, the principal truly believes that the delegate would be a good lead person for the initiative, project, or in this case character education effort. In some senses, this is a form of leadership mentoring; i.e., good principals look for leadership potential in others and proactively cultivate it. Amy Johnston, the principal of Francis Howell Middle School discussed above, has repeatedly nurtured leadership in her staff, and as a result, more than half a dozen of her former staff are principals or assistant principals in other schools. Brenda Logan, former principal of Hazelwood Elementary School, “encouraged staff to become leaders” and reports that over 15 “staff members have moved on to leadership positions . . . throughout the district.” Steve Zwolak, director of University City Children’s Center (a private inner-city early childhood center in Missouri), systematically trains administrative competencies and then sends those new leaders to lead their own schools. In fact, Steve invests heavily in professional development of his staff in general and in prospective leaders in particular. But when he mentors a future leader, his investment is publicly and explicitly tied to the desire for them not to stay in his school, as most would do, but rather to “go forth and multiply.” All exemplary leaders, Steve, Brenda, and Amy authentically delegate to others, and they do so with the intention of emptying the nest. The second ingredient in authentic delegation is to intend to (and actually) “have the delegate’s back.” In

other words, when there is pushback from staff, students, parents, and so forth, the principal will back up the delegate and lend his or her authority to whatever the delegate has proposed or requested. In addition, the principal will supply the necessary resources to allow the delegate to succeed.

Inauthentic delegation is when the principal assigns another to take on a task that he or she does not want and does not see as a true priority. I have seen this repeatedly in character education, most commonly in high schools, but across the PreK–12 spectrum. In most cases, there is external pressure on the principal to engage in character education (sometimes from the district administration), so the principal assigns an assistant principal, counselor, or lead teacher to “lead” the character education initiative. But all the principal is really interested in is (1) dumping the job on someone else and (2) being able to report that there is a character education initiative in the school. When the pushback comes, the principal does not back up the delegate, and when resources are needed, the principal does not provide them. This can be very harmful to morale and clearly frustrating to the often unwitting delegate who frequently thinks the inauthentic delegation is actually authentic. Furthermore, it is dishonest and cowardly.

A second way to demonstrate priority is through advocacy. When a principal serves as the town crier for character education, it demonstrates the importance it holds for him or her, and ultimately for the school. Over time, we have developed our “4W” model of how staff members often react to a new leader. The first W is that staff may think they can *wait out* the new principal. One of the staff in Amy Johnston’s school said that when Amy first contracted character education fever, the staff person figured this would pass if she just waited for the heat to die down. Amy, as if reading her mind, said, “and don’t think this will go away, because it won’t.” It didn’t. So when staff members are waiting out the principal, the principal has two main alternatives: *Win over* the abstainers or *winnow out* the resisters. In fact, we recommend that they try to win over all the staff first and then ascertain which are true resisters who are not salvageable. Jennifer Reph, as the new principal of Tremont Elementary School in New York, discovered that the staff were waiting out her new character education initiative (and other innovations, most notably in literacy

education), but she determined that they were good staff and so she worked hard and deliberately to win them over. Not only did she ultimately succeed (not one staff member left), but Tremont was recognized as a National School of Character in 2005 in large part for following her vision.

One of the most remarkable turnaround stories in the character education world is that of Ridgewood Middle School (RMS) in Arnold, Missouri, and its journey is quite different. Ridgewood (Haynes & Berkowitz, 2007) was a failing school. Only 9% of its students were meeting state academic standards, graffiti adorned all the bathroom walls and other surfaces, litter abounded, and student behavior and attendance were terrible. There were no resource officers (i.e., police assigned to the school) in any other district school, including the high schools, but there were two assigned to RMS. This school draws from a tough population with over 40% eligible for free and reduced lunch and most of the rest very close to eligibility. The school had long before become the district’s dumping ground for tenured teachers that other principals did not want, so the staff was largely incompetent, burned out, outright antagonistic to students, or simply treading water. Then-superintendent Diana Bourisaw saw the problem and brought in a new leadership team to fix this failing school. Tim Crutchley (principal) and Kristen Pelster (assistant principal) began a campaign to articulate and enact a character education vision for the school. Most of the staff did not respond to the articulation, to the advocacy, nor to the modeling (including in the classrooms) by the new leaders. Ultimately, Crutchley offered an ultimatum in February of the first year, essentially saying that the school was going in this direction and that if staff did not want to join the journey, they should consider going elsewhere. At the end of that year, one-third of the staff left. After 3 years, two-thirds of the staff had left. Crutchley and Pelster were able to hire new staff who fit their vision. In 3 years, they were recognized as a National School of Character. Today, their percentage of students meeting state academic standards has risen from the abysmal 9% they inherited to 70%. A parallel improvement in student behavior was at the heart of the many recognitions RMS has received. In this case, winnowing out the naysayers was necessary for the school to succeed, and indeed, flourish.

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The fourth and final W is to *work with the willing*. Every school, even a dumping ground for bad teachers like Ridgewood was, has some good teachers. When Tim Crutchley offered his ultimatum, he expected a pink slip the next day. Instead, what he got was about a third of the staff thanking him and saying they had been waiting for a leader with a positive vision. Finding the willing and working with them is critical. Brenda Logan (Hazelwood Elementary School)

had 80% of her staff on board with the school initiative to implement the Child Development Project. There continued to be resisters, but “we didn’t scorn/scold those staff members but just continued to move in the direction of becoming a caring school community.” All too often, principals spend inordinate time on the unwilling (the obstructers and underminers), and forget what they learned in the classroom; i.e., they don’t give the misbehavers the attention they are seeking. Oftentimes principals are so focused on the anticipated resistance that they change their desired messages, strategies, and priorities before ever sharing them with the staff (or other audiences). What they don’t seem to realize is that they are giving inordinate power to the anticipated resisters; i.e., those people are impacting the principal’s messages or strategies without the principal even knowing they are coming down the road!

A third means of setting priorities is to set, monitor, and enforce clear expectations. Simply saying what staff members are expected to do is not enough. We all quickly figure out what is enforced and authentically expected and what we can ignore. Jill Ramsey, recently retired as principal of Chesterfield Elementary in Missouri, a National School of Character, reported that

my expectation became using class meetings to set norms and conducting them weekly to resolve climate issues. Teachers were expected to have class meetings in every classroom that year. I also had “conversational struggles” with those teachers

who were not buying into this approach of using student voice to positively affect climate. In a couple of cases, these conversations resulted in teachers leaving Chesterfield.

WALKING THE TALK

While the gist of setting the priority is to talk the walk (to be the town crier for character education as an institutional priority), an equally important task of the effective leader is to walk the talk, i.e., to be a role model. We must be the character we want to see in others and for principals, we must be the character educator that we want to see in our staff. In this sense, the principal is a role model in two broad ways. First, she must model the kind of pedagogy, behavior management, and so on that she wants her teachers to enact. Second, she must be the kind of person (have the character) that she wants her staff and students (and all other stakeholders) to be.

Being a paragon of virtue is certainly supererogatory. Most educators blanch at the thought of being held to such a high personal standard. Education is not and should not be merely a job. Rather, it is a calling, no less so than the calling to religious life or military service. It is a calling to service to others, and those others first and foremost are the students. Schools are there for students, not for the teachers or their unions, not for the parents or their votes, not for the administrators or their school boards. One helpful perspective on this is servant leadership (Greenleaf, 1991; Hunter, 1998). When a leader understands that his primary role is to serve his school and its stakeholders, then he is open to a path toward success. Pat McEvoy, new principal at Bayless (MO) High School, has said that his role is like a Hollywood producer. He notes that the true talent in Hollywood is the writer, director, actors, and so forth. The job of the producer is to get them the resources they need to do their jobs excellently. A principal’s role is to provide the resources and context so the teachers and other staff can do their jobs optimally, so the students have the best chance at flourishing in school and in life outside of school. In a study of educational leadership development programs, Darling-Hammond and her colleagues (Darling-Hammond, Meyerson, LaPointe, & Orr, 2010) argued that the

“ability to ‘support the adults so that they can support the kids’ is an in-a-nutshell description of instructional leadership” (p. 4). Greenleaf argued that “the secret of institution building is to be able to weld a team of . . . people by lifting them up to grow taller than they would otherwise be” (p. 35).

One of the clearest examples is the degree to which leaders invest in the professional development of their staff. As the title of the 2000 Neila Connors book indicates, *If You Don't Feed the Teachers They Eat the Students*. One of the primary ways of feeding teachers is serving their professional development. Jill Ramsey began “the journey at Chesterfield Elementary . . . by providing professional development by [the author of this chapter] to the staff on class meetings and buddy activities.” When Amy Johnston began the Francis Howell Middle School journey, she serendipitously was given \$20,000 in unexpended federal funding, but it had to be expended in a matter of weeks or it would be lost. She and I quickly crafted a way to invest the money in the professional development of her staff. She brought 17 people to my summer institute in character education (still the largest group ever to attend from one school), and her school was off and running. As a principal, do you make it easier for staff to be out of the building for quality professional development, to attend graduate classes, to access professional development

funds, and so on? And do you model professional development yourself?

At one middle school I have worked with, both the principal and assistant principal have graduated from LACE and are authentically and deeply committed to character education. However, they have not been successful in getting their teachers to buy in to this new vision. After pushing and pushing

and getting more and more resistance, I offered them a new strategy. I suggested that they stop pushing character education and take a full year to do two things: (1) build healthy personal relationships with each teacher (more on this below); and (2) become a servant to their teachers. For the latter, I suggested they

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I suggested that they . . . (1) build healthy personal relationships with each teacher and (2) become a servant to their teachers. For the latter, I suggested they approach each teacher individually and ask, “What can I do to help you do your job better this year?”

approach each teacher individually and ask, “What can I do to help you do your job better this year?” Of course, that comes with two catches: They have to authentically mean it, and they have to deliver (of course, within reason). They plan on starting the next school year this way, and I have high hopes for a breakthrough for them as leaders (I think this will be transformational for them), for their staff as potential character educators, and for the school in general.

Amy Johnston (principal of Francis Howell Middle School) reports that when they began their character education journey about 8 years ago, she suddenly realized that it implied that they would be held to the same standard as they were proposing for their students; in other words, they had to be respectful, responsible, caring, fair, honest, and so forth. That was a daunting realization but to her credit and that of her staff, they were willing to take on the challenge. Some of her staff (and teachers from many other schools) report that this journey made them not only better educators, but better people: better parents, better spouses, and so on. Rima Vesilind, former principal of Woodley Hills Elementary (a National School of Character in Virginia),

modeled support for my staff by taking a family of five who were living in a car into my home—single mother and four children. That experience gave me a deeper understanding of what it was like to have nothing and to have to work through Social Services to support a family.

Many great principals understand, like Rima, that they cannot ask their staff to do things they themselves are not willing to do. When Tim Crutchley and Kristen Pelster, at RMS, discovered that so many students were failing because they were not handing in their work and teachers were assigning them zero grades for the missing work, they established a ZAP (Zeros Are not Permitted) program. Every day at lunch, there was a separate area for students who had missing work. But as good leaders they realized that they could not dump the responsibility for chasing down noncompliant students on teachers. Instead, they personally staffed 1.5 hours of this study hall every day. Once a teacher handed in the ZAP form, it was the principal’s job to get the work done. They also routinely went to the homes of tardy students to

drag them out of bed and get them to school. When Karen Smith and her counselor, Myra Earls, implemented the Navigator Buddy program at Mark Twain Elementary, each staff member volunteered to work with an at-risk student. The idea was to provide a special adult-child relationship for students who needed additional support while at school. Karen as principal had a Buddy, as did Karen's secretary, Marie. The power of this came into poignant clarity when Karen's fourth-grade Buddy was home over Spring Break with his older, special-needs brother when their father murdered their mother and then took his own life. This 10-year-old had Karen's cell number as her Buddy and could call her for help and support in the aftermath of this horrendous tragedy. "The advantage was the close relationship I had with [her Buddy] that helped me meet his needs and help family members (who I had never met) transition both boys into the new life they would be beginning."

Other principals have taught me that the best way to get students or staff to act in desired ways is for the principal to model it. Janis Wiley, former principal at Mann Elementary in St. Louis, reported that she got the students to pick up litter in the school yard simply by going out each day and doing so herself. Mike Galvin, former principal of Columbine Elementary School in Colorado (2000 National School of Character), wanted a school where

everyone took responsibility for all the students (not just those in their own class, or those under their care at specific times of the day). The idea was to spread leadership around a bit—trying to build an ethic based on Peter Block's definition of leadership as "taking responsibility for the good of the whole."

He especially wanted shared responsibility applied to students with special needs, i.e., a mix of inclusion and shared leadership/responsibility. As with Janis, who needed to do the "dirty work" so that students would do likewise, Mike had to do the dirty work to get the staff to do so.

One boy, a fourth grader with severe cerebral palsy, had problems with bowel control and often had to be cleaned up by whoever was available. After hearing a few times, "Well,

that's not MY job" or "I'm too busy," I let the teachers and teacher assistants know I was available for diapering and clean up duty and insisted they call on me. Of course, it only took one or two times of me doing cleanup for the message to get across: We all pitch in, wherever and whenever we can help.



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The other part of role modeling is being the character education instructional leader and more generally a model of the practices that they want their staff to implement. One of my pet peeves is faculty meetings. I take perverse pleasure in reenacting what such meetings typically look like. When I do that, it sadly looks quite familiar to most educators. Some of the problems with the typical routine of a set of announcements read by the principal to the staff are that (1) all of their staff are literate and could have read all that material outside of the meeting, (2) they are wasting the only time the staff gets together as a community when they could have been strategically building the adult community, and (3) they are modeling terrible pedagogy. My recommendation is to sit in a circle and simply talk about how to make the school a better place for everyone. As Gus Jacob, former principal of one of Ernest Boyer's original Basic Schools, has said, "when teachers talk to teachers about teaching, good things happen for children." I would add that when principals talk *with* (not *to*) teachers about teaching, then good things happen for students because the principals are modeling collaborative, democratic, constructivist pedagogy. Amy Johnston (Francis Howell Middle School) likes to ask provocative questions, which she refers to as "starting World War III"—for example, "How do we handle late work?" "How many Fs did we give last semester? Why? And when and why do we give zeros and how can that philosophy reflect true learning of the curriculum?" "What is the difference between teaching and learning?" These lead to great discussions and help move an adult culture (and a school) forward, which as we saw above is the core of John Dewey's (1909) definition of morality and the moral purpose of schools.

Another innovation Amy Johnston made was to replace most whole-staff meetings with plan-time meetings of smaller groups. The idea was that the staff was pretty large and those large meetings were not the best use of their time. So instead she meets with smaller groups during shared plan time. As Amy reports, “they aren’t class meetings, but they give the same feel because everyone is heard and each meeting is different because the [participants] are different” at each meeting. This, then, becomes the leader modeling both self-sacrifice (spending more time in meetings) and good pedagogy (a form of class meetings). The teachers union actually tried to stop her school from doing these plan-time meetings, but the staff so valued them that they continue to do them anyhow.

Mark Eichenlaub established a schoolwide morning meeting for Jefferson Elementary in Belleville, Illinois, as a fulcrum for school improvement.

The daily meeting started every day with the Jefferson family together, setting the tone for the day’s activities. It focused all on the single vision of building an environment through developing a single vision. Of everything I had to do as a principal, I rarely missed my daily meeting with the students. I made it a top priority.

For him, this was also the modeling of how to lead class meetings.

I kicked off the school year by personally leading a schoolwide class meeting of K–sixth graders, approximately 400 students. In doing this, I was able to model the power of effective class meetings. Staff was able to see that even first graders were able to grow and were willing to participate.

HUMAN RESOURCES EXPERT

One of the biggest challenges for school leaders is the strategic and intentional management of adult human resources. I was on an airplane heading home and chatting with my row mate. When he learned that I do character education, he said, “My partner and I are in real estate. In real estate, there are 3 Ls: location, location,

location. But I used to be in private loan banking, and we had 3 Cs: credit, collateral, character. But I think it should be character, character, character.” When I asked why, he said, “if you loan money to someone with poor character, I don’t care how rich they are, they are going to try to avoid paying you back. And if you loan money to someone with good character, I don’t care how poor they are, they are going to eventually find a way to pay you back.” That is when the light bulb went on for me. And I said, “you know the three Rs of education, reading, ‘riting, and ‘rithmetic? Well, the three Rs of character education are relationships, relationships, relationships.” I just discovered that James Comer similarly wrote, in 1999, “*Children’s . . . development depends on relationships*. I have often said that relationships are to development what location is to real estate: We need relationship, relationship, relationship” (p. xxiv, italics original).

The key point is that not only child development, but child learning, and the institutional culture upon which they both depend, rely upon healthy, prosocial relationships. Schools need to systematically and intentionally foster such relationships. Certainly the principal needs to “get,” prioritize, and model this. But she also needs to be the social engineer for the adult culture. This is something that is not taught in most educational leadership programs, or certainly not in the depth necessary for optimal performance in a school leadership role. Brenda Logan, former principal at Hazelwood Elementary School (Louisville, KY), reports that, at her hiring in 1990, her then superintendent said, “Brenda, you would not have made it to his point in the application process without being knowledgeable about a lot of areas that a principal is responsible for. From this point on, however, what will matter most is how you deal with people.” Principals often stumble because they don’t know how to adjudicate conflicts between teachers (or other staff) or between teachers and parents. They don’t know how to deal with resisters. They are not prepared to handle a teacher who is in meltdown because her husband left her that morning, for example. Principals need to recognize that it is their job to deal with intrapersonal and interpersonal crises and to proactively build a positive adult community and culture. One place this has been dealt with effectively is in the social-emotional learning literature (Patti & Tobin, 2003). Research supports the argument that the principal as the central

player in an ethical and caring adult community in the school, one where interpersonal trust reigns, is important for the school's effectiveness (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004).

There are many strategies and tasks involved here. One is staff selection. Hiring staff members who share the same educational philosophy and vision makes it more likely that the staff will gel and form a cohesive culture. Rima Vesilind reports that when she became principal of West Potomac High School, "I hired staff who cared about students and who believed that character development was the core of all instruction." As noted above, when Kristen Pelster and Tim Crutchley took over leadership of RMS, two-thirds of the staff left after 3 years. This afforded them the opportunity to hire staff who resonated with their vision for the school.

Another strategy is having the courageous conversations with those who are resisting or undermining the welfare of the school. Mark Eichenlaub (Jefferson Elementary School) reports that

I had two teachers who were not in favor of doing character education. I met with them personally and listened to their concerns. Once that was done respectfully, and that was key, I let them know that the school and community had made a decision to move forward and they had three choices: come along on the journey, go to a different school, or resign. Glad to say they stayed and ended up being two of the greatest champions of character on staff. As a leader, your staff deserves that honest yet respectful dialogue, as it can make a difference for the character education movement and their careers.

Such conversations don't have to be one on one. Amy Johnston (Francis Howell Middle School) had to confront the same issue that Pelster and Crutchley faced, namely too many failing grades due to unsubmitted homework. While Pelster and Crutchley went to each teacher and asked him or her to explain each failing grade, Johnston charted the grades and distributed the list of all teachers and all the failing grades to the entire teaching staff. She simply asked them what they saw in the data and let them come to their own conclusions. This discussion led

to a zero-tolerance policy for zero grades, similar to what happened at Ridgewood Middle.

Fundamentally, leaders who can build strong relationships are adept at putting the "self" on hold. This is a highly complex skill that takes years to perfect. Allowing oneself to be the conduit that seeks and elicits more and more trust from the other, without inserting your own agenda, gives the other person the space to fill, while giving him or her the needed social permission to do so. Such leaders also need to have a shared willingness with others to engage in authentic and transparent exchanges. To do so, they also need self-knowledge and the willingness and openness to share feelings and thoughts with others.

Underlying all this is that principals need to treat staff the way they want staff to treat others, just as we have already discussed above in the section on modeling.

A PEDAGOGY OF EMPOWERMENT

If schools are to promote character, and if they are to promote the development of future democratic citizens (Berman, 1997), they must be democratic themselves. Sadly, the entire American education system is woefully hierarchical and authoritarian (Wagner & Kegan, 2006). While I frequently promote a pedagogy of empowerment in the classroom (e.g., class meetings, shared norms, cooperative learning, etc.), it is also imperative for principals to parallel that in the way they run their schools. They need to be willing and able to share leadership (Deal & Peterson, 2009). In a sense, this is an example of the leadership paradox; i.e., how can one lead by giving up control, by sharing one's authority and responsibility with others?

One of the biggest wastes of resources in schools is the disuse of the minds of students and teachers. Students, even kindergartners, will often outthink their teachers. Likewise, teachers will often outthink their administrators. Yet all too rarely do teachers ask students to solve problems, make decisions, plan events, and so on. And all too rarely do principals ask teachers to do likewise. Principals need to flatten the governance structures in the school, empower staff and other stakeholders, and simply make intentional and institutionalized space in schools for all those voices

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to be aired, to be heard, and to matter (Barth, 2001).

Rima Vesilind reports that at both her schools, this was a priority. At Woodley Hills Elementary, "I led a community retreat—4 half-days during which every staff member, many parents, and several interested community members participated—to determine our core values, our concerns, and suggestions for change." At West Potomac High, her focus was on empowering students:

I got students to help. Seeing that our test scores in math were suffering primarily in the African American male population, I asked a group of successful junior and senior Black males for their ideas. They were shocked at the data and worked with me to create a mentorship group, BAM—Brothers Achieving More—that raised math scores of Black males and positively changed the culture of that population.

Kristen Pelster claims that the biggest influence on the culture and success of RMS was "creating and implementing character/leadership classes for students that empowered *all* students to lead and created autonomy and a sense of belonging in the school."

Empowerment was a cornerstone of the success at Hazelwood Elementary School. Brenda Logan, former principal, reports that "my belief in collaborative decision making, involving the entire staff in school reform and 'thinking' that I could work with all people was the foundation for moving into that first year." This, for her, was the "principle that became a basis for success." As a school leader, it was her understanding the strategic (and ethical) importance of respect for and empowerment of others that buttressed the growth at Hazelwood. "I have always looked for strengths in other people that would serve as positive contributions to whatever initiative we were working on and to be inclusive of other people's thoughts and opinions, even when very different from my own."

CONCLUSION

Schools must be places not only of academic learning but also of student development, particularly of the development of moral and civic character. School leadership is the single most critical element in whether and how well this happens. While we do not have a lot of research on the nature and impact of school leadership in creating schools of character, we have enough to know that such leaders need to understand this basic thesis (to "get" it); need to make it an authentic priority for the school; need to model it in how they act personally and professionally; need to be an intentional and effective social engineer in promoting a caring and ethical culture among staff first and then among all stakeholders; and need to foster and model a pedagogy of empowerment where all stakeholders' voices are given space, are heard, and make a difference. Some may be tempted to argue that this is not unique to character education leadership, that rather, this is simply good educational leadership. I don't disagree at all. I often say that good character education is good education. Likewise, good character education leadership is simply good educational leadership. Investing in such good leadership, through selection and professional development, is investing in our schools, our children, and ultimately our future.

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