The Science of
Character
Education

Marvin W. Berkowitz

THE FIELD OF character education is rife with controversy as debates question whether the focus should be on virtues, values, behaviors, or reasoning capacities. Controversy swirls around the varied approaches to implementing character education: experiential learning, peer debate, indoctrinative teaching, community service, participatory governance, reading about character, and so on. Many of these debates have strong roots in theoretical and philosophical differences.

However, when and if the dust settles, it should be clear that the bottom line of character education is not philosophical distinctions, pedagogical ideologies, politics, or other conceptual disagreements. Rather, it is the development of children. In this chapter, I will attempt to take a very focused and practical approach to character education, to take a stab at beginning what can become a science of character education. I will examine what we mean by character, how it develops, and what can be done to foster its optimal development.

A Word about Words

Before we can explore what we know (and don't know) about character development and character education, we need to discuss terminology. The labels for this field vary by history, geography, and ideology. Currently in the United States, the term du jour is character education. That is the term I have chosen to use in this chapter. However, only a decade or two ago, the more popular term was moral education. The term moral still tends to be preferred in many other countries, especially in Asia, although one group in Japan has wedded the term to psychology and produced a new term, "moralogy." Preceding that, values education was in vogue in the United States. Values education is, in fact, the currently preferred term in Great Britain (although the Scottish Consultative Council on the Curriculum prefers the term values in education whereas others in Great Britain prefer values education). Furthermore, different theoretical perspectives are aligned more with one or another of these various terms. In the United States, character education has been aligned most closely with more conservative, traditional, and behavioral approaches. Moral education has been aligned with more liberal, constructivist, and cognitive approaches. Values education has been aligned with more atheoretical, attitudinal, empirical approaches. At this point in the discussion, I expect you to be quite confused and even annoyed at this degree of terminological disagreement. I know I am. Do not panic, however, because I will, from here on use the terms character development and character education to represent all these disparate points of view, and you can now proceed to forget the confusion that I have just outlined for you.

There has been too much of the "my theory can beat up your theory" mentality in the field. I prefer a more dialectical approach, whereby the intersections and conflicts between different approaches can be used to generate agreements, compromises, and best solutions. It is time to use science to help kids become good people rather than lay out landmines of theory disagreements.

This diversity and disagreement have led to a rather fractionated perspective on what I refer to as character development. In this chapter, I choose to use the term character (only in part because I hold the title of Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education); however, I use it as an integrative, bridging term. One goal of this chapter is to build bridges across the theoretical chasms that have been dug by contentious warring factions in this field. Actually, I am rather uninterested in terminology. I would be just as happy to call the field moral education, which I did for over two decades, or to create a new all-encompassing rubric such as developmental education. In fact, I wouldn't mind calling it Henrietta or Blog or 2C3a#*11.a as long as it is defined clearly and as long as it optimally serves the development of socio-moral competency in children. As I said before, this is all about kids, not esoteric distinctions, labels, or factions. Those rarely serve kids' best interests.

Character Education: The State of the Art

Just as it is difficult to define character and find consensual labels for character education, it is difficult to summarize what contemporary character education entails. The term character education has come to encompass what used to be rather different fields. I will therefore try to provide a quick and dirty bird's-eye view of character education. Ideally, as we shall see later in this chapter, quality character education should be intentional and comprehensive—sometimes it is intentional; rarely is it comprehensive. The Character Education Partnership articulates standards for quality character education in their "Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education" and the corresponding "Character Education Quality Standards" (both of which can be accessed through their website: www.character.org). These standards include an explicit values agenda, schoolwide implementation, promoting positive relationships and intrinsic motivation, defining character comprehensively,

partnering with parents and community, and being data-driven. It is rare to find schools or districts that fulfill all of these standards.

Most character education initiatives center around a set of words or concepts that represent the ethical agenda of the school; i.e., "words of the month" (or week, or even day) that identify the character outcomes identified as central to the school's mission by the school, community, or both. Those words sometimes are chosen by the school staff, sometimes by district staff or a community panel, and sometimes adopted from another source (such as the Character Counts's "six pillars of character"). What schools do with these words is quite variable. Although sometimes they simply pay lip-service to them, usually they display them prominently (on calendars, stationery, walls, and so on). They may use them as the foci for curriculum or extracurricular programming.

Often character education stands alone. Frequently middle schools and high schools put character education into homeroom or advisory class meetings or make it an elective or required class. Character education is typically part of the curriculum in literature and social studies classes, but it actually can appear in almost any part of the curriculum, including math and physical education. Many schools connect their character agenda with their service opportunities. Although service learning is a common vehicle for character education, any form of service may support character education.

Character education can focus on specific issues such as sex education, health education, environmental studies, multicultural education, peer conflict resolution, risk prevention, and religious studies. It may focus on fostering specific character outcomes such as moral reasoning (typically through ethical dilemma discussion) or altruism (through service).

Character education is less frequently manifested as comprehensive school reform. Models such as the Just Community School, Child Development Project, Responsive Classroom, and Resolving Conflict Creatively Program are all approaches that stress pervasive schoolwide

culture transformation. Whereas all of these and other approaches are observed in schools, the justification for selecting one approach over another is often less than scientific. Typically it is based on convenience, external advocacy, limited knowledge, intuition, and so on. The bottom line is that what stands as character education is highly variable and infrequently meets the standards for quality. To create a true science of character education, we need to back up and explore what we mean by character, how it develops, and what we know about how schools can effectively foster its development.

What Is Character?

It is impossible to foster optimum character development without first understanding what comprises character. That would be tantamount to trying to build a better mousetrap without knowing what a mouse is. It would be nice if there were consensus on what is meant by the term character, but unfortunately, that is not the case. In common language, we use the term to mean either some measure of a person's goodness ("that really shows a lack of character on his part") or a person's eccentricity ("she is such a character!"). In both cases, the implication is that we are referring to some enduring characteristic of the person, although that is not always the case (his lack of character may be out of character for him).

The picture is even muddier when we examine how the term character is used technically. Some do not systematically distinguish between moral and nonmoral character, whereas others either restrict their definitions to the moral domain[1] or systematically separate moral from nonmoral aspects of character.[2] Even when these distinctions are

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1. L. Kohlberg, *The Psychology of Moral Development, Essays on Moral Development, Vol. 2* (New York: Harper and Row, 1984).

2. M. W. Berkowitz, "The Complete Moral Person: Anatomy and Formation" in J. M. DuBois, ed., *Moral Issues in Psychology: Personalist Contributions to Selected Problems* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1997): 11–42.

made, the criteria often differ; e.g., Nucci considers the moral domain to comprise universals,[3] whereas Lickona differentiates between universal and nonuniversal morality.[4] For some, character is pure personality, whereas for others it is mainly behavioral. Many omit cognitive functioning from their definitions of character. Some are comprehensive in their definitions, others not; some specific, others fairly global. I will not spend time here listing the differing definitions of character. I think you get the idea. Instead, I offer my own definition.

I define character as *an individual's set of psychological characteristics that affect that person's ability and inclination to function morally.* Simply put, character is comprised of those characteristics that lead a person to do the right thing or not to do the right thing. This serves as a global definition of character. Obviously, however, I still need to define what psychological characteristics affect moral functioning.

Elsewhere, I offer what I call the *Moral Anatomy.*[5] By this, I mean the psychological components that make up the complete moral person. There are seven parts to the moral anatomy: moral behavior, moral values, moral personality, moral emotion, moral reasoning, moral identity, and foundational characteristics. Whether one adopts this particular model of character or another (such as the tripartite model of cognition, affect, and behavior—head, heart, and hand—espoused by the Character Education Partnership and Lickona), the point to understand here is that character is a complex psychological concept.[6] It entails the capacity to think about right and wrong, experience moral emotions (guilt, empathy, compassion), engage in moral behaviors (sharing, donating to charity, telling the truth), believe in moral goods, demonstrate an enduring tendency to act with honesty, altruism, responsibility, and other characteristics that support moral functioning.

3. L. Nucci, *Education in the Moral Domain* (New York: Praeger, 2001).
4. T. Lickona, *Educating for Character* (New York: Bantam, 1991).
5. See M. W. Berkowitz, 1997.
6. See Lickona, 1991.

Just as Howard Gardner has redefined intelligence as a complex of psychological characteristics in his theory of multiple intelligences, I attempt to redefine character as a complex constellation of psychological dimensions of a person.

This perspective on character provides us with a road map through the following sections of this chapter. I am not wedded to this particular definition, but rather to defining character in a psychological, differentiated, and comprehensive manner. With this or another comprehensive, differentiated definition of character in hand, we can directly address how character develops and what can be done to foster or nurture its development.

Character Development

The recent epidemic of heinous acts of violence by children against children, such as the shooting of a young girl by a six-year-old boy in Flint, Michigan, has prompted many to raise the question of when character develops. This is a rather tricky question that I believe is fundamentally unanswerable. First, we have just established that character is a multifaceted phenomenon. Second, the components of character each have their own developmental trajectories. Third, each person develops at a different rate. Fourth, the developmental sequence and profile of the components of character differ in different individuals. Finally, the components of character tend to develop gradually, or in stages over a long period of time. Hence, we cannot state that the six-year-old boy in Flint did or did not have character. We cannot state either that six-year-olds in general do or do not have character. Rather, we can describe what aspects of character are typically developed (and to what degree) around six years of age. Then we can compare that child with what is typical, being careful to remember that children develop at different rates. For instance, if a six-year-old child showed no remorse over hurting another, did not realize that others may have perspectives different from his, or seemed not to care what others

thought of him, we could then say that he seemed not to be developing some aspects of character that should be present at around his age.

Given this perspective, it is fair to claim that character begins developing at birth or even earlier. Because there is evidence of genetic influences on character, we can reasonably argue for prenatal character development. There is also evidence that parents begin to bond emotionally to a child even before birth, and we know that the bond between parent and infant is a critical factor in character development. It is well beyond the scope of this chapter to chronicle developments of all of the components of character development. Instead, I will illustrate its course by presenting developments of selected components in infancy, childhood, and adolescence (for a more detailed presentation, see Damon[7]).

Infant and Toddler Character Development

Some of the earliest, most significant hallmarks of the development of character are (1) the beginning of empathy, (2) the development of a concept of persons, and (3) the formation of the attachment bond. All of these begin during the first year of life.

Mature empathy entails self-awareness, self-other differentiation, perspective-taking, and the ability to draw inferences about the causes of another's distress. Martin Hoffman describes four stages of empathic development, the first of which covers most of the first year of life and the second of which begins at about nine or ten months of age. In the first stage the infant cries in response to another's crying, at first only very reflexively. (It is also around six months when the child develops a first sense of the other as separate from itself.) In the second stage, infants spend more time observing the other in distress and actively attempt to reduce their own resulting empathic distress (e.g., by thumb-sucking). This self-consoling behavior reveals the immaturity of empathy at this point; it is still focused on the self. Nevertheless, this is the

7. W. Damon, *The Moral Child* (New York: Free Press, 1988).

foundation of mature empathy, which is central to mature moral functioning or character.

The person concept refers to differentiation of self from other; that is, a recognition that you and I are separate entities with separate agency (independent capacities for causality) and separate existences. This begins to develop during the first two years of life. All character components (e.g., perspective-taking, moral reasoning, shame, cooperation) depend upon the development of self-other differentiation. It is impossible to be a moral agent without first recognizing that there are other human beings in the world.

The development of an attachment bond, the powerful emotional relationship that develops between an infant and his or her primary caretaker (typically mother), may be the single most important step in the development of character. The development begins roughly in the middle of the first year of life and evolves over the course of the life span. More important, however, it serves as a major influence on the nature of all future relationships. It has been linked to many other aspects of character such as peer cooperation, compliance with adults, and altruism. In fact, the absence of the motivation to have positive relationships with others (e.g., detachment, disinterest in social relationships) is a symptom of psychopathology, according to the American Psychiatric Association. The failure to form a secure attachment bond early in life may be the most significant cause of childhood antisocial behavior.

These diverse aspects of character (and others not described here) in the first two years of life are the foundation for later mature character and represent the first stages of character formation.

Childhood Character Development

So much of character develops during childhood that it is difficult to select a few examples for this discussion. Nevertheless, I will examine three: self-control, guilt, and perspective-taking.

Whereas self-control begins, in a sense, with the compliance of the

toddler, the full capacity to regulate one's own impulses internally makes the greatest headway during the preschool years, especially between the ages of five and seven. Consequently, children are better able to delay gratification, control their impulses and aggressive urges, and direct their behavior. Roy Baumeister argues that self-control is a master virtue upon which other virtues depend.

Given the current interest in problems caused by children who seem not to have developed a conscience, the development of guilt feelings is of critical importance in understanding character development. Guilt is typically described as a self-critical emotional response to one's own transgressions. Thomas Lickona differentiates between constructive guilt (self-criticism leading to motivation for improvement) and destructive guilt (lowered self-esteem and self-denigration). For the development of character, we are clearly interested in the former. Grazyna Kochanska and her colleagues have found guilt feelings to increase significantly from two to three or four years after first emerging at about eighteen to twenty-four months.

Perspective-taking develops throughout the preschool and elementary school years, and its development continues throughout adolescence. There is some evidence that children as young as twenty-four to thirty months of age can do some rudimentary perspective-taking; however, the major advances in the capacity to understand others' points of view occur between three or four years and twelve years of age. Because moral functioning depends upon the ability to balance different people's interests, perspective-taking development is a critical foundational component of character. Clearly, key components of character become fully operative during the childhood years, making childhood a significant point for the transition to being a mature social and moral agent.

Adolescent Character Development

Most character development in adolescence is a continuation of what has already begun in infancy or childhood. I will examine the continued

development of moral reasoning and the formation of a moral identity as two examples of adolescent character development.

Moral reasoning is the growth of the cognitive capacity to reason about matters of right and wrong, allowing for increasingly effective and mature moral decision-making and moral judgment. Moral reasoning is understood to develop in stages throughout the life span, beginning as young as three or four years of age. However, it is only at about eleven or twelve, as the child enters adolescence, that moral reasoning becomes predominantly prosocial, although the beginnings of such considerations are evident in the elementary school years. As children move through adolescence, their criteria for judging right and wrong shift from mostly self-oriented concerns with concrete consequences to themselves, to more socially oriented concerns with the impact of their behaviors on others, their relationships with others, and the social organizations of which they are members. The ability to figure out what is right and what is wrong is crucial as all people confront novel or ambiguous moral problems and true dilemmas. Furthermore, moral reasoning is related to a variety of moral and immoral behaviors such as altruism, cheating, delinquency, and risky behaviors (such as unsafe sexual practices and drug use).

Identity is the individual's self-constructed sense of self. Recent interest has turned to the concept of moral identity, the centrality of being good to one's self-concept, because of its appearance in studies of living and hypothetical moral exemplars. Adolescence is a critical time for the formation of a sense of self, an identity. Therefore, it is likely that the formation of a sense of oneself as a moral agent develops at the same time.

Sources of Character

If science can reveal what character is and how it develops, what can it tell us about how adults and society can actively promote the development of character in children? After all, it is up to adults and society to

ensure that children have the opportunity to develop into competent moral adults, both for the sake of children and for the benefit of society. Family (especially parents) is typically considered the predominant influence on a child's character formation. Additionally, school, peers, community (including the media), religion, and biology are contributors.

It is clear that how parents raise a child is the predominant influence on the child's character formation. Some of the operative variables are parental affection, consistency of parenting, response to children's cues and signals, modeling, expression of values, respect for the child, and open discussion with the child. All aspects of children's character are impacted by these and other child-rearing factors.

School has an influence later than parenting because (1) parents are much more emotionally salient in the first years of life, and (2) many children do not experience full or even part-time schooling until they are three, four or five years of age, when, as we have just seen, many aspects of character are already developing. Schools can influence a child's self-concept (including self-esteem), social skills (especially peer social skills), values, moral reasoning maturity, prosocial inclinations and behavior, knowledge about morality, values, and so on.

The influence of peers begins in the preschool years, especially for children who attend preschools, but this influence clearly increases throughout childhood and peaks in adolescence. Peers have a strong effect on self-concept, social skills (e.g., conflict resolution, making and maintaining friendships), moral reasoning development, involvement in risky behaviors, and so on.

Community influences center around mass media exposure, neighborhood characteristics, and cultural values. Media clearly affect prejudice (racism, sexism, ageism), aggression, and sense of security. Religion has been related to lower risk behavior and greater mental health. The evidence about biology is much more controversial. Some argue for a strong genetic influence on aspects of character (altruism, risk-taking) and others suggest a much lesser role for genetics. Other bio-

logical factors have also been implicated, but only in extreme cases, such as in utero exposure to teratogens (such as opiates, alcohol) and serious disease factors.

Parenting and the Development of Character

Developmental psychology has much more to tell us about the effects of parenting on children's character development than other influences, including schooling. For that reason, John Grych and I examined the research literature for information about how parenting influences character development in children. What we discovered is that (1) much relevant research already exists, (2) a common core of parenting variables that promote character development can be identified from an empirical base, and (3) those parenting variables can also be applied to teacher behavior and character education.

We identified eight character variables extensively studied by developmental psychologists: social orientation (attachment), self-control, compliance, self-esteem, empathy, conscience, moral reasoning, and altruism. You will recognize some of these from the discussion above. We looked at what research has uncovered about the effect of parental behavior on the development of those eight character outcomes. We were able to identify five parenting behaviors that were significantly related to at least two of the eight character outcomes. *Responsivity/ nurturance* was related to six of the eight outcomes (all but empathy and self-control). Parents who were responsive to children's signals and needs and had a warm, loving relationship with their children produced children of strong, multifaceted character. Families who used an open, democratic style of family discussion, decision-making, and problem-solving produced children who exhibited five characteristics (all but empathy, self-control, and social orientation). Parents who used *induction* (praising or disciplining with explanations that include a focus on the consequences of the child's behavior for other's feelings) produced children with relatively more mature empathy, conscience, altruism

and moral reasoning. Parents who set high expectations (*demanding-ness*) that were attainable and supported, had children who were high in self-control, altruism, and self-esteem. Parents who *modeled* self-control and altruism had children high in self-control and altruism. Additional research will likely expand the list.

We can clearly mine the rich empirical literature in developmental psychology to better understand character development and what influences it. We know much about how parenting affects character and can easily apply this knowledge to schools, especially to teacher behavior.

What Works in Schools?

Few approaches to character education have been extensively researched. One of those, values clarification, has largely disappeared from the scene, in part due to generally ineffective scientific evidence. Extensive research on classroom dilemma discussion has demonstrated that it effectively promotes the development of moral reasoning capacities in students, and much is known about how it works. A detailed study of the Just Community Schools approach has demonstrated its effectiveness in promoting moral reasoning and stimulating the development of positive school culture and prosocial norms. The I-can-problem-solve approach to preventing impulsive and inhibited behaviors has been demonstrated repeatedly to be an effective means of reducing such behaviors in young school children.

The most extensive body of scientifically sound research about a comprehensive character education approach concerns the Child Development Project (a program of the Development Studies Center in Oakland, Calif., www.devstu.org). This elementary school reform program has been shown to promote prosocial behavior, reduce risky behaviors, stimulate academic motivation, create a positive school community, result in higher grades, and foster democratic values. Furthermore, it has identified the development of a caring school com-

munity as the critical mediating factor in the effectiveness of character education.

Numerous other character education initiatives and programs report single studies of effectiveness, but are not often reviewed and published. The best examples are the Responsive Classroom, Second Step, Positive Action, and the Resolving Conflict Creatively Program.

Solomon, Watson, and Battistich have compiled an extensive review of specific research studies about such programs and specific practices in implementing character education.[8] They conclude that four practices have strong empirical support for promoting character development: promoting student autonomy and influence; student participation, discussion, and collaboration; social skills training; and helping and social service behavior. An additional important mediating variable is moral atmosphere. The Child Development Project uses the term caring community and applies it both to the classroom and the entire school. The degree to which children perceive their schools as caring communities is directly related to the effectiveness of those schools in promoting student character development. Just Community Schools defines the variable somewhat differently, but reports that promotion of the development of moral atmosphere in the school is directly linked to the development of moral reasoning in students, and this finding has been internationally replicated. One solution to the lack of an empirical foundation on which to build a science of character education is to mine other fields for scientific evidence relevant to character education.

A fertile area to explore for relevant scientific research is risk-prevention. Alan Leschner, director of the National Institute on Drug Abuse, recently argued that prevention is generic and entails identifying those factors that protect against the risk factors that promote undesir-

8. D. Solomon, M. S. Watson and V. A. Battistich, "Teaching and Schooling Effects on Moral/Pro-Social Development" in V. Richardson, ed., *Handbook of Research on Teaching*, 4th ed. (Washington, D.C.: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2001).

able and dangerous behaviors. Other leaders in the field frequently echo this sentiment. Drug-use prevention researchers increasingly recognize that character-based interventions can effectively prevent substance use and abuse, just as character educators discover that their initiatives are preventive. Likewise, two of the most effective violence-prevention curricula, Second Step and Resolving Conflict Creatively, have been identified by the Character Education Partnership as character education initiatives. At the same time, the most effective character education program, the Child Development Project, is identified by the Department of Education as a model violence-prevention program and by the Center for Substance Abuse Prevention as a model prevention program. Others argue for the application of character education as a form of sex education. Furthermore, reviews of such tangentially related fields reveal striking parallels in what works.

Summary of What Works

Although much more research needs to be done to better understand what does and does not work, there is enough information available to reach some conclusions. The following represent seven rules of thumb for effective character education based on the research literature to date.

First, it is clear that the primary influence on a child's character development is *how people treat the child*. When schools focus on exhortations (PA announcements, posters, lecturers at special assemblies) or didactics (curriculum) as they are typically disposed to do, they miss the boat. To do effective character education, either in the home or the school, one has to focus on how people (especially those most significant to the child, but not only them) treat the child. What is the child's experience in spending a day in school? Is that child treated benevolently and with respect, or bullied or ignored? Does the child perceive school and classroom as nurturant, supportive places or as psychologically or physically toxic? Relationships are crucial to character development, so character education must focus on the quality of

relationships in the school. This includes adult-to-child and child-to-child relationships. We can readily extrapolate from the parenting literature to adult and student relationships. Those relationships need to be benevolent (nurturant, supportive), authentic (honest, open), respectful (inclusive, valuing the student's voice), and consistent (predictable, stable). Most of the recent spate of school murders have implicated experiences of peer bullying as part of the cause of those horrors. Quality character education promotes prosocial relationships and caring school and classroom communities.

Second, we know that children learn, and their development is influenced by, what they observe, so the second principal factor in effective quality character education is *how significant others treat other people in the child's presence*, as Theodore and Nancy Sizer note in the title of their recent book *The Students Are Watching.* Parents are well aware that their children monitor and retain much of what they observe teachers and other adults in the school doing. Teachers are likewise well aware that students, even very young ones, report a wide variety of family behavior in the classroom. In both cases the observed and reported behaviors are often ones the adult models did not even realize were being registered or even observed, and in many cases they are behaviors they would rather were not observed at all and certainly not broadcast publicly. Students are indeed watching. What is worse is that they are also imitating. Elementary school teachers have taught me that if you want to know what kind of teacher you are, simply watch your students playing school. Modeling of positive behaviors such as altruism and empathy leads to such behavior in children. Modeling of undesirable behaviors such as violence and deceit similarly leads to the increase in those behaviors. It is pointless to expect children to be respectful and responsible if the adults in their lives do not act respectfully and responsibly. Many educators argue that they are not character educators and often that they do not want to be. If you work with or around children, *you cannot* not *be a character educator.* Abstaining is not an option. Your behavior will affect children's character development, for

good or for ill. Cleaning up our acts and walking the talk is necessary for character education to be effective.

Third, schools need to *expect good character of all members.* In other words, character needs to be a clear priority and expectation—schools must demand good character. The expectations should be clear, they should be high but attainable, and there should be support structures to give students and other school members a reasonable chance of meeting those expectations. These expectations can come from a variety of sources, but ideally they come from the entire school community. All stakeholder groups should at least have some representation in the process of either generating or ratifying (if they come from another source) those expectations.

Previously, I stated that exhortations are not the primary means of affecting character development. There is nonetheless a place for *espousing positive character.* It serves two functions. First, it can reinforce what children learn and develop from watching and being treated positively by others. Secondly, it clarifies the often unclear messages of behavior. The powerful moral parenting behavior called induction works largely because it entails explanations of parent evaluative behavior (praising, chastising). So, as Thomas Lickona has taught us, we need not only to practice what we preach, but we also need to preach what we practice.

Children also need *opportunities to practice good character.* They need schools that promote student autonomy and influence. They need the opportunity to build skills such as perspective-taking, critical thinking, and conflict resolution, necessary for being a person of character. They also need opportunities to do good. Schools increasingly promote service activities of a variety of natures. Peer mediation, student self-governance, and charitable activities are examples of such opportunities.

To nurture the development of moral thinking capacities, students need *opportunities to reason about, debate, and reflect on moral issues.*

This includes opportunities to take others' perspectives, especially when those perspectives are different from one's own. This can be done within the curriculum, as in lessons and methods that promote student peer discussion of moral issues embedded in social studies and literature, or case studies in science or philosophy. It can also be done in stand-alone classes and programs that focus on issues of character and morality. The key is to create the kind of atmosphere in which students engage their peers to discuss such issues and in which they feel socially safe to do so honestly and forthrightly. Educators often need assistance in creating such an atmosphere, but that is essential for schools to effectively promote character development in students.

Finally, it is preferable if *parents are actively and positively involved in the school's character education efforts.* There is decidedly less scientific evidence to support this suggestion, but extrapolations from other areas of study clearly support the fact that parents will always be the primary influences on children's character development. Character education is most effective when schools and parents work in partnership.

Later Character Education

Thus far the analysis has been restricted to the typical years of elementary and secondary schooling, roughly ages six to eighteen, the kindergarten through high school years. Colleges and universities are also interested in contributing to the formation of character in the future citizens of our society. Having had the privilege of serving as the inaugural Ambassador Holland H. Coors Professor of Character Development at the United States Air Force Academy in 1999, I became very interested in what postsecondary education can offer to the character development of students. Lt. Colonel (Retired) Michael J. Fekula and I wrote an article detailing the principal components of postsecondary character education. They are:

- Teaching about character (morality, ethics)
- Displaying character (both by individuals and by the institution through its policies)
- Demanding character
- Practice in character (through apprenticeship, participation in school governance, community service, and experiential learning)
- Reflecting on character (verbally, in writing, and so on)

You will recognize many of these components from our prior discussion. However, what institutions like military academies and religiously affiliated colleges and universities (I spent twenty years teaching at Marquette University, a Jesuit institution in Milwaukee) bring to the table (at least potentially) is consistent, well-supported, and justified whole-institution commitment to character education. That is a remarkably valuable commodity in promoting character in schools and elsewhere.

Where Do We Go from Here?

Given the nascent state of the new "science of character education," many questions remain unanswered.

- What are the long-term effects of character education?
- Which components of comprehensive character education models impact which components of character?
- What are the most critical components of effective character education?
- How does effective character education vary from elementary to middle to high school?
- What is the overlap between effective character education and effective school-based prevention and service learning?

- How can we most effectively measure character?

- What is the "dose response" for effective character education; that is, how much is enough to make a difference?

- What existing forms of education impede the fostering of character?

- Must character education be schoolwide or can it be effectively implemented at the classroom level?

These are but a few important questions left for character scientists to answer. As more research is done, many more questions will surface. But if we work to develop a true science of character education, based on an empirical understanding of character development and those interventions that foster character development, then we will be well-armed to make a significant contribution, not only to our children, but to the world in which they and we live.