Moral Education

How a person develops morally is partially, if not predominantly, based on cognition and mental operations and the way he or she interacts with family, schools, and society—more precisely, on the roles and responsibilities he or she learns and deems important based on contact with people and social institutions. Schools have traditionally been concerned with the moral education of children. In the nineteenth century, moral education became linked to obedience and conformity to rules and regulations. Standards of moral behavior were enforced by rewards and punishments and were translated into grades in what at different times was called morals and manners, and later citizenship, conduct, or social behavior.

Until the late nineteenth century, public schools typically exhibited a strong, nonsectarian Protestant moral tone. This standard was reflected in activities such as Bible readings, prayers, and the content of the New England Primer (students memorized sermons and learned their ABCs through rote and drill) and McGuffey readers (that reflected old-fashioned industrial morality such as private property, hard work, diligence, and savings, as well as patriotism and love of country).

By the turn of the twentieth century, the schools shifted the notion of moral education to purely secular activities, such as student responsibility, student cooperation in class and student councils, flag salutes, assembly rituals, and community and school service. "Dick and Jane" eventually replaced the McGuffey readers and depicted middle-class values of the era—small-town life, a nuclear family with two children, a father as the breadwinner and mother as the housewife. Life was depicted in these books in terms of happy, neat, and white, with intact families living in a clean and pleasant home. People exhibited a Protestant, inner-directed (respect toward adult authority, community centered, work-success ethic, achievement orientation, future-time orientation), and moral life. Racial and ethnic diversity was excluded, or confined to a unit such as "Children from Other Lands." The civil rights movement of the 1960s and the subsequent rise of racial and ethnic studies ended the Dick and Jane series.

The point is, schools have never ignored moral education, but the values have reflected the majority culture. Teachers have avoided the teaching of morality because of its subjective nature and its potential trappings or overlap with religious indoctrination. Most moral teachings have been indirect, limited to modeling middle-class behavior and attitudes in the classroom and community, and the teaching of patriotism and heroism through history and English subject matter.

Moral Knowledge

It is possible to give instruction in moral knowledge and ethics. Teachers can discuss philosophers such as Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle who examined the good society and the good person; the more controversial works of Immanuel Kant, Franz Kafka, and Jean-Paul Sartre; religious leaders such as Moses, Jesus, and Confucius; and political leaders such as Abraham Lincoln, Mohandas Gandhi, and Martin Luther King. Through the study of the writings and principles of these moral people, students can learn about moral knowledge. For young readers there are Aesop's Fables and Jack and the Beanstalk. For older children there are Sadako, Up from Slavery, and The Diary of Anne Frank. And for adolescents, there are Of Mice and Men, A Man for All

Seasons, Lord of the Flies, Death of a Salesman, and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn. All these books deal with moral and value-laden issues. Whose morality? Whose values? There are agreed-upon virtues—such as honesty, hard work, integrity, civility, caring, and so forth—that represent an American consensus. It is there—if we have sufficient moral conviction to find it.

Of course, when it comes to the likes of Huck Finn, we have created a red herring, where the likes of Bill O'Reilly meet Jesse Jackson. Is it a racist book that should be banned or a masterpiece (perhaps the number-one fiction book written by an American author) that should be read, discussed, and analyzed? Huck is a backwoods kid, not too bright, the precursor of the modern juvenile delinquent, a rebel who finds a moral cause without giving up his pranks or surrendering his identity.

Jim is a runaway slave, a clown and companion, living in a white man's world in a servant-type role, but, by reason of his place in society and his clever nature, he neither says all that he means nor means all he says. Acting as the clown, and with poetic imagination and humor, he is able to get along in his troubled world, and the reader learns to respect his wit, his jiving and joking and use of other compensatory devices. In some respects, Jim is the future "Amos" or "Andy," a rascally creature southern whites were prone to make him, who performed from behind an ethnic mask in the same way Will Smith was forced to play in Men in Black, Bruce Lee in Green Hornet, and Tonto in The Lone Ranger.

Think of Mark Twain as a minstrel—performing and mocking convention, dissecting the minds and matters of the day through jokes, tales, and gestures that circulated above the southern white folks along the Mississippi River and now the

black folks in African American studies and nearly everyone in postcolonial and neo-Marxist studies who condemn "whiteness."

We have become a sanitized society, where literacy passages considered sensitive or potentially offensive to minorities are bleeped out of school literature. What used to be called history, literature, art, or photography is often scrubbed according to whim or worry. With a click of a mouse, textbooks, tests, films, and even literary classics can be edited to fit what one critic now calls an "offenseless society," tailored to every school group and community. The cultural wars of old have shifted: The political and moral overtones "have given way to quieter, more modest strokes of revision or deletion. The parties on either side might be liberal, conservative or anything in between." It becomes a little silly, however, when the New York State Board of Regents changes thin for skinny and heavy for fat on their standardized tests, when U.S. history guidelines develop a dialogue between George Washington and an Indian leader to demonstrate American pluralism, or when the religious right see witches, pagans, and devils in textbooks.

The question arises: Can a school or society trying to depict all racial, ethnic, religious, and minority groups (including women, homosexuals, and those with disabilities) with dignity also nourish its literary and artistic culture? Schools can select a science text without reference to evolution, a history book that excludes the Holocaust, and now, with the computer, edit and omit passages that the community may find offensive in classics (Homer's Odyssey, Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice, Chekhov's Rothchild's Fiddle, William Faulkner's Brer Tiger and the Big Wind). The language cut is often part of the conversation of society. Rather than expecting students to question and analyze such statements, we have revisionary and doctored versions of text, failing to recognize that outside classrooms and schools, the literature and lyrics flow without comment or question. Do we really create a purer school environment or purer society by omission? Since the Puritan era, American society has failed to filter out passages that deal with reality, what is sometimes considered politically or morally offensive.

Instead of asking moral questions and requiring students to grapple with issues of life, much of the routine of school is to teach prescribed content and skills—things students are expected to know. As John Goodlad has commented for a 10-year period, across the curriculum at all grade levels, students are expected to recall and memorize information, answer mundane questions in workbooks and textbooks, and pass multiple-choice and true"-false tests. The point is Huck and Jim need to

be heard, then analyzed and discussed, along with Homer, Shakespeare, Chekhov, and Faulkner.

According to Philip Phenix, the most important sources of moral knowledge are the laws and customs of society, and they can be taught in courses dealing with law, ethics, and sociology. However, moral conduct cannot be taught; rather, it is learned by "participating in everyday life of society according to recognized standards of society." Although laws and customs and obedience are not always morally right, accepted standards do provide guidance for conduct and behavior.

The content of moral knowledge, according to Phenix, covers five areas: (1) human rights, involving conditions of life that ought to prevail; (2) ethics concerning family relations and sex; (3) social relationships, dealing with class, racial, ethnic, and religious groups; (4) economic life, involving wealth and poverty; and (5) political life, involving justice, equity, and power. The way we translate moral content into moral conduct defines the kind of people we are. It is not our moral knowledge that counts; rather, it is our moral behavior in everyday affairs with people that is more important.

Moral Character

A person can have moral knowledge and obey secular and religious laws but still lack moral character. Moral character is difficult to teach because it involves patterns of attitudes and behavior that result from stages of growth, distinctive qualities of personality, and experiences. It involves a coherent philosophy and the will to act in a way consistent with that philosophy. Moral character also means to help people and to accept their weaknesses without exploiting them; to see the best in people and to build on their strengths; to act with civility and courteousness in relations with classmates, friends, or colleagues; to express humility; and to act as an individual even if it means being different from the crowd (e.g., to say "no" when almost everyone says "yes").

Perhaps the real test of moral character is to cope with crisis or setback, to deal with adversity, and to be willing to take risks (that is, possible loss of jobs, even life itself) A because of one's convictions. Courage, conviction, and compassion are the ingredients of character. What kind of person do you want to emerge as a result of your effort as a teacher? Teachers can engage in moral education and teach moral knowledge, but can they teach moral character? (See Teaching Tips 3.2.) In general, the morally mature person understands moral principles and accepts responsibility for applying these principles in real-life situations.

The Morally Mature Person (Teaching Tips 3.2)

The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development has written its description of the morally mature person. The characteristics it lists offer teachers a framework for classroom discussions and classroom interaction.

1. Respects human dignity:
    a. Showing regard for the worth and rights of all persons
    b. Avoiding deception and dishonesty
    c. Promoting human equality
    d. Respecting freedom of conscience
    e. Working with people of different views
    f. Refraining from prejudice actions
2. Cares about the welfare of others:
    a. Recognizing interdependence among people
    b. Caring for one's country
    c. Seeking social justice
    d. Taking pleasure in helping others
    e. Working to help others reach moral maturity
3. Integrates individual interests and social responsibilities:
    a. Becoming involved in community life
    b. Doing a fair share of community work
    c. Displaying self-regard and other moral virtues – self-control diligence, fairness, kindness, honesty, civility – in everyday life
    d. Fulfilling commitments
    e. Developing self-esteem through relationships with others
4. Demonstrates integrity:
    a. Practicing diligence
    b. Taking stands for moral principles
    c. Displaying moral courage
    d. Knowing when to compromise and when to confront
    e. Accepting responsibility for one's choices
5. Reflects on moral choices:
    a. Recognizing the moral issues involved in a situation
    b. Applying moral principles when making moral judgments
    c. Thinking about the consequences of decisions
    d. Seeking to be informed about important moral issues in society and the world
6. Seeks peaceful resolution of conflict:

a. Striving for the fair resolution of personal and social conflicts
b. Avoiding physical and verbal aggression
c. Listening carefully to others
d. Encouraging others to communicate
e. Working for peace

The world is full of people who understand the notion of morality but take the expedient way out or follow the crowd. Who among us (including our colleagues) possesses moral character? Who among our students will develop into morally mature individuals? To be sure, moral character cannot be taught by one teacher; rather, it takes a concerted effort by the entire school, cooperation among a critical mass of teachers within the school, and involves the nurturing of children and youth over many years. Ted and Nancy Sizer ask teachers to confront students with moral questions and moral issues about their own actions or inactions in ways that may be unsettling or difficult. As teachers, we need to address things that threaten the self-concept and self-esteem of students. We need to deal with issues of inequity and social injustice, while promoting cooperative behaviors, intergroup relations, and respect for diversity among children and youth.

The Sizers want teachers to "grapple" with ideas, to "dig deep," to ask why things are so, to examine what evidence there is, and to explore what thoughts and actions mean. They hope that teachers will stop taking shortcuts in their preparation or testing/evaluation practices, and they hope that schools will reduce the "sorting" practice in ways that sometimes correspond with social (class or caste) groupings. Although some sorting of students is necessary, it should be flexible enough to respect students' and parents' wishes and to avoid stereotyping. In the end, the Sizers argue that students should not experience hypocrisy in classrooms and schools that claim all students are equal or all students can be what they can be, while at the same time discriminating against students of class, color, or low ability.

Schools must establish moral character as policy in which all teachers are expected to adopt. One or two teachers by themselves will have little impact. It takes a school community to implement a program of moral character, whereby students are taught that they are responsible for their actions and that values such as honesty, respect, tolerance, compassion, and a sense of justice are worthwhile and important concepts to learn and become benchmarks in life or calls for action.

Educators should not establish the attitude or take the easy way out and claim that the student population is too diverse and moral consensus cannot be reached, or that the best they can do is to hope to promote democratic principles, mutual respect, and critical thinking. That's all well and good, but it begs the issue that education is designed to socialize children and youth, and shape thinking for the good of society. To avoid tough moral issues, or to pooh-pooh character development, is to fall into Amy Gutman's trap, who believes that moral issues are inappropriate in public schools because of the diverse backgrounds and biases of students. It also means to adopt Nel Noddings's misguided notion that caring for strangers is more important than shaping minds and attitudes of students.

There are some 7.5 million Muslims living in the United States who are diligent, law-abiding, and hard-working. It may be acceptable for Moslem students to assert their identity and wear their traditional facial scarf or headdress in their homes, mosques, or communities, but if they had never worn it in American public schools prior to 9-11, it is not now acceptable because it is potentially inflammatory and likely to invite disruption or violence. Moslem students do not have to wear Air Jordan sneakers or Calvin Klein jeans to prove they are homogenized Americans. But freedom of speech does not allow someone to yell "fire" in a crowded and enclosed place, nor does it allow at a time of war for a group of students who may be profiles or wrongly associated with the enemy to put it in their classmates' face. To urge or protect this type of behavior is liberal gibberish and an affront to common sense.

Similarly, if people are to live in an environment of peace and mutual respect, then to disseminate the pictures of the barbaric murder of Danny Pearl (whose throat was cut on video because he was an American) on the Internet should be judged as morally repugnant and should not be excused by the protection of the First Amendment-not when the country is at war with terrorists who wish to topple our way of life. The corporate world had the technology to censor this inflammatory media, failed to, and must be judged morally contemptuous.

If all of this seems to smell like some form of the Alien Sedation Acts, McCarthyism, or antidiversity, then you are missing the point. Students walking around and displaying Nazi tattoos in school, or with para-military garb in the postperiod of Columbine High School, should be stopped at the school doors and told to go home and cover up their tattoos and/or dress in a way that is nonthreatening.

Regardless of the position of the American Civil Liberties Union, school officials must take moral positions. There are certain events that are horrifying and represent the most evil aspects of human behavior. Students who laugh at pictures of the rape of Nanking, the Holocaust, the Killing Fields—or the incineration of the World Trade Center—should not be excused because of their ignorance, or religious, racial, or ethnic backgrounds; nor should they be provided with a school platform at the K-12 level to voice their "justification" or to get into a historical debate about racial superiority of certain groups. They are wrong on all moral accounts, pure and simple, given the tenets of a civilized society. Their minds are rot, and they are potential followers and instruments of others who preach hatred. It is the role of the teacher to shape their minds and attitudes, if at all possible, to the laws of living with and respecting others. Some of you may infer this is propaganda, or even fascism, and not what schools are about—claiming all American students should have the freedom to voice their opinion in class. And I answer, not when it reflects hate and mocks the death of thousands or millions of people.

There is enough evidence to believe that Aristotle and Plato would accept my view, given their idea of a good society—and what is ethical and rational behavior and so would the U.S. Supreme Court as it is presently constituted. For all the victims who had to grasp their final moments, decent people understand that there needs to be some bit of good prevailing over evil. When a religious, racial, or ethnic group, or a nation, is aghast—and people can recall the background screams of the dying children and youth do not need to be insulted or hear some banal rhetoric. The last vanishing moments of the dead should not be compromised by a political or religious message that espouses hate. Hate should not be allowed into the K-12 curriculum, even under the guise of freedom of expression.

Good moral character requires a clear set of values, but someone who has a clear set of values (i.e., Adolf Hitler, Bin Laden, or Enron CEO Kenneth Lay) may not be moral. The values a person holds depend on many factors, including historical and social environment, education, and personality. Teachers and schools are always transmitting values to students, both consciously and unconsciously. Sometimes the transmission occurs through what educators call the "hidden curriculum," the unstated meanings conveyed by teacher attitudes and behavior, class routines, school policies, and the curriculum in general.

Moral Development: Piaget and Kohlberg

Although some self-control of behavior may be seen in the preschool years, researchers agree that not until a child is about 4 years old do moral standards

begin to develop at a rapid rate. During the period when a child begins to abandon behavior governed by what he or she wants to do at a particular moment, the child's conscience tends to be erratic, largely confined to prohibitions against specific behaviors and based on external sanctions. Before age 5, morality does not exist for children because they have little or no conception of rules. From about 5 to 6 years, a child's conscience becomes less confined to specific behaviors and begins to incorporate more generalized standards; it becomes determined less by external rewards or punishments and more by internal sanctions.

Piaget's Theory of Moral Development

Piaget's theory was based on techniques of investigation that included conversing with children and asking them questions about moral dilemmas and events in stories. For example, he might ask a child, "Why shouldn't you cheat in a game?" Piaget's observations suggest that from ages 5 to 12, children's concepts of justice pass from rigid and inflexible notions of right and wrong, learned from parents, to a sense of equity in moral judgments. Eventually, it takes into account specific situations or circumstances.

As children grow older, they become more flexible and realize that there are exceptions to rules. As they become members of a larger, more varied peer group, rules and moral judgments become less absolute and rigid and more dependent on the needs and desires of the people involved. Wrote Piaget, "For very young children, a rule is a sacred reality because it is traditional; for the older ones it depends upon a mutual agreement."

On the basis of numerous studies, Piaget concluded:

There are three great periods of development of the sense of justice in the child. One period, starting at the age of 5 and lasting to the age 7-8, during which justice is subordinated to adult authority; a period contained approximately between 8-11, and which is that of progressive equalitarianism; and finally a [third] period that sets in toward 11-12, and during which purely equalitarian justice is tempered by consideration of equity.

Kohlberg's Theory of Moral Reasoning

More recently, Lawrence Kohlberg studied the development of children's moral standards and concluded that the way people think about moral issues reflects their culture and their stage of growth. He outlined six developmental stages of

moral judgment and grouped three moral levels that correspond roughly to Piaget's three stages of cognitive development:

1. Preconventional level. Children have not yet developed a sense of right or wrong. The level is comprised of two stages: (a) children do as they are told because they fear punishment and (b) children realize that certain actions bring rewards.

2. Conventional level. Children are concerned about what other people think of them, and their behavior is largely other-directed. The two stages in this level are (a) children seek their parents' approval by being "nice" and (b) children begin thinking in terms of laws and rules.

3. Postconventional level. Morality is based not only on other people's values but also on internalized precepts of ethical principles and authority. This level also includes two stages: (a) children view morality in terms of contractual obligations and democratically accepted laws and (b) children view morality in terms of individual principles of conscience [as well as a higher being].

Unless a reasonable degree of moral development takes place during childhood and adolescence (i.e., unless standards of right and wrong are established), the child, and later the adult, is likely to engage in asocial and/or antisocial behavior. On the other hand, if the acceptance of others' standards or the internalization of standards and prohibitions is unduly strong, guilt may develop in association with a wide variety of actions and thoughts. Ideally, individuals work out an adequate sense of morality and at the same time avoids self-condemnation, in the context of the culture in which they live.

Kohlberg's theory has been widely criticized on the grounds that moral reasoning does not necessarily conform to development and involves many complex social and psychological factors, that particular moral behaviors are not always associated with the same reasoning (and vice versa), and that his prescriptions are culture bound and sexist. However, he has made researchers and practitioners aware of moral reasoning and has provided a moral theory, along with Piaget's, to guide teaching and learning.

Beyond Piaget and Kohlberg

Although Kohlberg found that his theories of moral reasoning have been replicated in various countries, and that it occurs in the same order and about the same ages cross cultures, he has been criticized that his early work was limited mainly to boys. For example, Carol Gilligan has maintained that boys and girls use different

moral criteria. Male morality centers more on individual rights and social justice, whereas female morality focuses on individual responsibilities, self-sacrifice, and caring.

Kohlberg revised his research on the basis of the preceding criticism, but he (and others) failed to find any male-female significant differences in moral reasoning or moral maturity. Although there is no convincing evidence that women are more caring, cooperative, or altruistic, as Gilligan has argued, these ideas have been embellished by Nel Noddings in her book *The Challenge to Care in Schools* and by several feminists who advocate the virtue of caring within the family and in educational, social, and medical settings and the need to reduce competitive behavior in schools and society. Gilligan's ideas have become increasingly feminist and also seem to coincide with the everyday folk belief that "men are from Mars" and "women are from Venus," as well as in popular Broadway play such as I Love You. You're Perfect. Now Change and The Caveman. If you ask her why love often falls apart, it is the fault of men, who feel they are the center of the universe and are guided by the male-centered tale of Oedipus. My own male response: Ho-Hum.

The most important limitations to Piaget's and Kohlberg's theories are that they fail to distinguish between moral reasoning and actual behavior. Moral behavior does not necessarily conform to simple rules, guidelines, or developmental stages. The social context, an individual's overall personality and perception of reality, and the individual's motivation to behave morally are factors for consideration. (For example, there are always opportunities to cheat or steal, but there is also the possibility of getting caught.) But what is at stake? A 50-cent candy bar, a $10 CD, or the SAT test questions that may admit you into Harvard or Yale? Although certain aspects of moral reasoning account for moral behavior, the correlation can be weak—given social and personal variables. According to research, moral reasoning can be predicted much more precisely than moral behavior. The latter is more complex; furthermore, the link between moral reasoning and moral behavior is minimal.

Cheating: Just about Everyone Does It

Besides mutual respect and understanding, what else do students owe each other? Given the competitive nature of grading and school ranking at the high school level, there is a tendency among students to cheat. According to Noddings, "many students deny that cheating is wrong," and teachers fail to "protect students who are committed to fair competition." We can blame the system, and argue that it fosters a competitive culture, which leads to winning at all costs. We can also

blame parents for creating pressure to succeed, starting before their children enter school, when they begin lap reading and introducing them to foods and animals, and even American heroes with a page and picture for each letter of the alphabet.

A recent study at Duke University indicates that about 75 percent of college students acknowledge some academic dishonesty. Why? Typical responses are: "I guess the first time you do it, you feel bad. After a while, you get used to it." Another student states: "There are times when you need a little help." We can discuss all the policies colleges have implemented to reduce cheating, ranging from signing pledges not to cheat to judiciary boards that have the right to suspend students. But now, with the Internet, there are a slew of students (literally hundreds of thousands) surfing sites for papers available to them for a few bucks a page—among them are Cheater.com and Schoolsucks.com (which boasts 10,000 hits per day). In this world of Oz, professors are forced to fight back and enlist Internet services that can identify papers that have been lifted from one source or cut and paste from several sources.

The bottom line is that cheating reflects moral laxity that will not go away in a world where our heroes and star citizens cheat—or wink and nod. Athletes take drugs to enhance their performance because the result is higher salaries and more endorsements. Politicians lie and are often caught with their fingers in the cookie jar or hiding stuffed shoeboxes in their closets. Judges are bought and decisions are often based on politics and not the law. CEOs invent new accounting techniques to disguise losses, and then proceed to cheat their employees and the general public out of hundreds of billions of dollars while they become millions of dollars richer. The clergy steals children's innocence one moment (creating havoc, fear, and guilt for the rest of those children's lives) and preaches the gospel the next moment. Bishops—who knowingly covered up such actions, protected these priests, and allowed them to remain in the ministry, where they continue to abuse children—now worry about scandal.

Given the so-called pillars of society who are supposed to model moral behavior, who publicly adhere to a rigorous moral code, and who demand accountability from others but have not been held accountable for their own behavior, ask why children cheat. Once upon a time, when "Dick and Jane" taught most of us how to read and Dr. Seuss and "mad comics" reached out to "those other kids," when boys were naughty and girls were nice, and when children showed respect for their parents

and teachers and other adults in positions of authority, and before the death of the traditional American family, cheating was a "no-no."

Given the modern world of technology, fast foods, and fast cars, along with sex, drugs, and MTV, students have little connection with the old values of society—what some kids today might label the "Stone Age" and what some educators might call the "pre-postmodern age." It is apparent that schools have mirrored the social transformation of society, including contemporary society, and so have students. William Bennett and Lynne Cheney, with their emphasis on American virtues and values, and even Jerry Falwell, who claims to have 16 million followers, cannot turn back the clock.

Moral Freedom

Intellectuals love to generalize about U.S. culture: Do Americans live in a democratic and free society or are we materialistic and morally corrupt? Are we in a culture of victims, disbelief, and consumerism or are we a hard-working, god-fearing, and thrifty society? Do we still breed rugged individuals or have we become anxious conformists? Are we shamelessly permissive or tenaciously hanging on to our puritanical values? Many intellectuals would argue there is a cultural and moral war going on in our nation, illustrated by hot debates on welfare, immigration, labor, religion, homosexuality, and family life. Just about every educator, psychologist, sociologist, and journalist has something to say about these issues in context with "traditional," "emerging," and "postmodern" values.

Moral freedom, according to Alan Wolfe, defines the way we live and the type of society we are. Based on in-depth interviews in eight niche communities, all very different—from a small town in Iowa, a black community in Hartford (CT), a middle-class suburb in Ohio, to a gay district in San Francisco and a wealthy area in Silicon Valley—he focuses on changing morality in America. His conclusions are that Americans on all sides of the political continuum are engaged in reconciling individual freedom with a common morality. Those on the political left welcome individual self-fulfillment and reduced powers of the police, and those on the right put devotion to God first and insist on law and order and strict penalties for criminal behavior. Moral relativists on the left support smoking bans, organic food, strict environment laws, and hate-crime legislation. Those on the right acknowledge the profit motive that drives industry, the need to search for oil in Alaska, and the importance of patriotism, forgiveness, and redemption—pretty close to what the McGuffey readers advanced some 150 years ago and to what William Bennett preaches today on television and in his books.

In general, Americans are moral moderates. We seek high standards of virtuous behavior but not mandates or prescriptive laws. We strive to live the good, virtuous life, but we worry about the divorce rate and its effect on children. Respect for honesty is neutralized by the need to function in a perceived dishonest world. Morality is a form of common sense and law; it is eclectic, like religion in Americas. It boils down to each of us as the individuals and how we relate to others. Americans tend to "personalize" religion, borrowing from traditional scriptures and new age spiritual movements. American teachers tend to "individualize" teaching and learning theories that suit their own personality and knowledge base. Likewise, Americans tend to "personalize" moral behavior, drawing from both conservative and liberal thinking, from ideals of godliness, self-discipline, and modern notions of self-fulfillment, sexual freedom, and counterculture ideals. A lot of this moderation stems from the fact that we are not a homogeneous population, driven by one religious or political ideal. We are a mixed breed of people with mixed traditional and liberal ideas about morality. In this mixed environment, teachers and schools must find their way—and not run away from teaching morality.

Since the 1960s and to the present, radical youth, cultural activists, black-power advocates, feminists, and homosexuals have rejected the concepts of puritan moral behavior, the political and social measures of the Establishment and traditional order. They have fashioned their own moral ideas and interpretations to counter the ones bequeathed to them. In many cases, conservative reaction in schools and society has been just as opinionated and exaggerated, reflected in the articles and commentaries of Forbes, National Review, and the Wall Street journal. In short, Americans embrace moral and spiritual codes of behavior, but they also embrace moral freedom.

Can moral philosophy guide children (and adults) in their personal lives (or professional lives)? Educators are often uneasy about imposing certain values or virtues on students, but I believe that this is part of their professional responsibilities. Yet, they tend to shy away from this responsibility and make excuses why they would rather not get involved in moral education. As a group, they should set down the values and virtues they want to teach by allowing the parents and community the final measure and form of commonality.

Certain values can be agreed upon by both niche and diverse communities, even in the midst of new family structures and reconfigured racial, ethnic, and gender identities that now shape communities in which the schools serve. The scope and

depth of the curriculum will need to be changed at all grade levels, teachers will need to model appropriate and agreed-upon behaviors, and students will have to be held responsible for their behavior. The idea is to establish school policies and expectations for all teachers and students. The consequences of ignoring moral issues, under the guise of separation of church and state or that morality is subjective or eclectic (which it is), will mean the continual growth of school alternatives and choices that meet this need.

Right now, there is a moral vacuum in many public schools. Alfie Kohn would go one step further and argue that schooling has become extremely competitive, where students are no longer committed to helping each other, and parents have the attitude that only their child counts, and they don't want other students performing as well in school if it jeopardizes their child's chance to play five minutes more in the basketball game or their chance to learn. White, middle-class parents have fought to preserve a tracking system that discriminates against and limits children of color out of honor and advanced classes.

Jeannie Oakes goes one step further and maintains that middle- and upper-class parents may have nothing good to say about the likes of Pat Robertson and Rush Limbaugh, but when it comes to education issues they often sound like the Far Right. A lot of the hot issues among these people deal with direct and skill-based instruction versus abstract and discovery-based instruction, and preserving ability grouping and classes for the gifted and talented, sorting students, and providing letter grades, weighted grades, and class ranks for college admission purposes. Other issues deal with suburban school desegregation, SAT preparation, school finance, school spending, and property taxes.

The purpose of schools is to educate, socialize, and help children and youth function in society. Cognitive learning and informati0n—based skills are important, but they are not the be-all and end-all; they need to be tempered by moral constraints that recognize and distinguish between selfish behavior and proper behavior. Given the fact that most parents want what's best for their children, we need to constrain parents who send "quiet" messages to school administrators and pressure teachers, coaches, and principals so that their own kids are favored. The goal is to work for the vast majority of students, not a tiny minority whose parents are "connected" or like to complain.