Smart *and* Good
Integrating Performance Character and Moral Character in Schools

By Matthew Davidson and Thomas Lickona

If the national character education movement has had a motto to date, it's been Theodore Roosevelt's famous observation: "To educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." However — and we think this point has been overlooked — the reverse of Roosevelt's maxim is also true: To educate a person in morals and not in mind is to educate, if not a menace, at least a detriment to society. Who wants an honest but incompetent doctor, lawyer, or mechanic?

Samuel and John Phillips — founders of Phillips Academy in 1778 (Samuel) and Phillips Exeter Academy in 1781 (John) — got it right when they included *both* mind and morals in their definition of character: "Goodness without knowledge is weak and feeble, yet knowledge without goodness is dangerous. Both united form the noblest character." It follows that educating for character should be about developing ethics *and* excellence.

Throughout history, and in cultures all over the world, education rightly conceived has had two essential goals: to help students become smart *and* to help them become good. What is also clear is that schools need to help students develop character for both — performance character *and* moral character. And, yet, our research suggests that few high schools focus on this dual character development. Three years ago, we set out to answer the question, "Why is intentional character education relatively rare in high schools, at the very developmental stage where the need is arguably the greatest?" We were encouraged by the renewal of character education in the younger years, but we wanted to better understand what the best high schools were doing to foster character development.

Our research was guided by two main goals: *generating a new, more adequate theory of character and character education* — including a working theoretical model of a high school that integrates excellence and ethics in all phases of school life, and *describing promising practices* that render character education relevant to meeting the academic and behavioral challenges faced by high schools.

In pursuit of these goals, we assembled a database of some 1,400 books, articles, and reports on high school reform and adolescent character development. We conducted site visits to 24 award-winning high schools — independent as well as public — diverse in size and demographics and representing every geographical region of the country. We sought guidance from a national panel of experts and a national student leaders panel of thoughtful young men and women selected by their high schools.

In the fall of 2005, we published a 227-page report on the results of our study, *Smart & Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in Schools, Work, and Beyond* (available free on our website, *www.cortland. edu/character/highschool*). It describes nearly 100 promising practices for building eight strengths of character, psychological assets that we believe will help young people lead productive, ethical, and fulfilling lives.[1]

A New Definition of Character

Our research has led us to propose a paradigm shift in the way we think about character and character education. We came to realize that character isn't just about "doing the right thing" in an ethical sense; it's also about doing our best work. If that's true, then character education isn't just about helping kids get along; it's also about teaching them to work hard, develop their talents, and aspire to excellence in every area of endeavor.

Conceived in this way, character has two essential parts: *performance character* and *moral character*. Support for this concept of character comes from several sources: research on motivation and talent development,[2] research on lives of character,[3] and our own grounded theory research.[4]

At the heart of performance character is a "mastery orientation." It consists of those qualities — such as diligence, perseverance, a strong work ethic, a positive attitude, ingenuity,

and self-discipline — needed to realize one's potential for excellence in any performance environment — academics, extracurricular activities, the workplace, and throughout life.

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

Only by developing performance character will schools teach good work habits, increase achievement motivation, foster genuine academic excellence (which is independent of high grades and test scores), develop the scientific and entrepreneurial talent our nation needs, and produce a competitive, creative workforce in the global economy. Only by developing moral character will schools create safe learning environments, prevent peer cruelty, decrease discipline problems, reduce cheating, foster social and emotional skills, develop ethical thinkers, and produce public-spirited citizens.

Seeing Character as Central

Redefining character in this way, to include both striving for excellence (performance character) and striving for ethical behavior (moral character), helps all educators, especially secondary teachers, see character education as central to their daily work.

In our *Smart & Good High Schools* study we found many high school practitioners who did not initially self-identify as "character educators." This, we noticed, was because they tended to equate "character education" with "discussing ethics." For example, one science teacher said, "I teach chemistry; I don't teach character. Occasionally, I might touch on an ethical issue, but I really don't have a lot of time for that."

However, when these same teachers spoke about what students need to succeed in their classrooms — to do science, math, or history well — they described character outcomes, particularly performance character outcomes. They said they wanted students who are able to demonstrate:

- diligence — commitment to doing a job or assignment well
- perseverance in the face of difficulty
- dependability, including the ability to do their part on a project
- responsibility for having the required supplies or materials
- orderliness in their work
- ability to set goals and monitor progress toward those goals.

The chemistry teacher we interviewed, for example, said she talked with her students about academic responsibility. "I tell my students, 'You'll do better in this class if you keep an organized notebook. But it's your responsibility to do that; I'm not going to check it. You'll also do better on tests and in the course as a whole if you do the homework. But that's your responsibility as well.' And I tell them that if they miss a class, a responsible student calls his or her lab partner to get the assignment."

When you get to this point in the discussion, a light bulb goes on. Practitioners say, "If *this* is what you mean by character education, then, yes, I'm a character educator. In fact, I spend much of my time and energy trying to get these outcomes, because without these qualities of character, students are not likely to succeed in my class."

The *Smart & Good* model gives secondary school educators a new character language for describing the academic endeavor of teaching and learning that is the focus of their everyday efforts. Performance character and moral character are *needed for* optimal teaching and learning; performance character and moral character are *developed through* optimal teaching and learning. In this new paradigm, character education becomes the intentional integration of excellence and ethics.

The Interdependence of Performance Character and Moral Character

As we work with schools to promote this new paradigm, we stress that performance character and moral character are *interdependent*. Each needs the other.

Consider what can happen if you have performance character without moral character. You might choose selfish goals (such as making a lot of money that you spend only on yourself) or even evil goals (such as blowing up innocent people). Or you might choose a good goal (such as doing well in school or fighting terrorism) but corrupt your pursuit of that goal by using unethical means to achieve it (such as plagiarizing papers or employing inhumane methods to interrogate suspected terrorists). Moral character is what motivates us to choose good goals and then pursue them in a fully ethical way.

Or consider what happens if you have moral character without performance character. You might have good intentions but poor ability to execute. You might want to help others — through a service project, for example — but lack the organization, ingenuity, and perseverance to carry it out effectively.

Consider further two common kinds of problems in teaching. One is the teacher who has high moral character (gets to know every student individually, treats all with kindness and respect) but does not simultaneously demonstrate high performance character (*e.g.*, doesn't teach the content well or challenge students to develop their talents). Other teachers have the opposite problem: they have high performance character (know their content well and challenge students) but demonstrate poor moral character (*e.g.*, they insult and embarrass students, sometimes justifying such behavior as means of motivating them).

Research finds, in fact, that when you ask students, "How do you know when a teacher cares about you?"

they identify two behavior patterns as crucial: The teacher teaches well (makes class interesting, stays on task, stops to explain something if students don't understand), and the teacher is respectful, honest, and fair (doesn't embarrass, interrupt, ignore, or yell at students).[5] In short, the teacher displays *both* performance character and moral character — the integration of excellence and ethics.

"We're Doing Okay in Developing Performance Character"

When we work with high-performing schools, we find that school leaders often say, "I think we're doing all right when it comes to performance character — these kids do well academically — but we need work in the area of moral character." We would offer five points in response to this assessment.

1. High-performing schools are probably right when they say they spend more time and effort helping students succeed academically than helping them develop moral character. That's sadly true of schools in general, not just high-performing ones — and such schools do, in fact, need to pay more attention to the moral domain.

   For example, we recently worked with two independent schools. After completing our *School Culture Inventory*[6] (a formative tool for analyzing a school's moral and intellectual culture), both school staffs separately identified littering by students as one of their concerns. "When these students arrive in the morning," a faculty member at one school said, "the school is spotless. When they leave at the end of the day, it's trashed. Unfortunately, these kids have a very strong sense of entitlement — the feeling that someone else will pick up after them." Faculty at these two schools also named peer cruelty and a general lack of respect among students

as concerns. Clearly, schools must assign a high priority to moral character issues such as these, especially if they've been neglecting them in the past.

2. Even if a school's most urgent need is to do a better job in the moral domain, that doesn't warrant complacency about performance character. Just because students are performing well academically — as measured by traditional indicators like test scores and college admissions — doesn't necessarily mean they have high *performance character*. We point out to schools that performance is the *outcome* (the grade, the award, the achievement), whereas *performance character* consists of the character strengths, such as self-discipline, work ethic, endurance, and attention to detail that enables us to pursue our personal best.

   Lots of kids with high performance profiles are giving significantly less than their best effort and, consequently, are not doing what they're truly capable of doing. We want all of our students to live by the maxim of the great basketball coach, John Wooden: "Don't measure yourself by what you've accomplished, but rather by what you should have accomplished with your abilities."[7]

3. Schools that are tempted to think, "We're okay when it comes to performance character," would be wise to test that assumption against real evidence. For example, data from our CREE (Collective Responsibility for Excellence & Ethics)[8] evaluation instrument consistently demonstrates a clear need for greater attention to performance character — getting students to work to potential.

   Schools might also compare their own development of students' performance character with the standard set forth in Ron Berger's *An Ethic of Excellence: Building a*

Culture of Craftsmanship with Students. A former classroom teacher of 28 years, and a current consultant with Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound, Berger gives example after example — from his classroom, his school, and schools around the country — of the astonishing projects in science, social studies, writing, and community service that students of all backgrounds and ability levels can do when the school culture makes it "cool to care about excellence." "When I visited his classroom," says one middle school principal, "I was blown away by the quality of work his kids were doing."

4. If you think your students are doing okay when it comes to performance character, it's important to remember that research indicates that about 75 percent of high school and college students say they cheat[9] — a lack of integrity that appears to be increasingly true of the general public as well (see, for example, David Callahan's book, *The Cheating Culture: Why More Americans Are Doing Wrong to Get Ahead*[10]). Students defend their dishonesty with statements such as, "Cheating is necessary to give you the edge you need to succeed in life." Cheating behaviors call into question the state of students' performance character and moral character.

5. Finally, even students who do strive for excellence and achieve it honestly may be doing so in a very individualistic way. Especially in the competitive environment of a high-performing school, students are disposed to see their education as being "all about me" rather than a shared commitment to bringing out the best in each other. How many adolescents, in the course of their high school careers, are ever involved in a significant way in helping other students achieve their potential?

   One veteran researcher shared this observation based on his research: "The typical graduate of our individualistic high schools

is self-centered. Schooling as carried out in American society does little to prepare students for a life of citizenship and service."[11] Only if students develop performance character and moral character in a truly integrated way — as they can do through high-quality service learning, for example, and by regularly supporting and challenging each other to do their best work — will we produce graduates who are other-oriented and see their lives as having a larger purpose than advancing their own self-interest. Some do this; too many do not.

Four Keys to Excellence and Ethics

In helping schools apply the *Smart & Good* model, we have developed what we think serves as a kind of "master strategy" for developing performance character and moral character. We call this strategy "The 4 Keys." They are:

- *Creating a Community that Supports and Challenges* — developing a community (classroom, advisory group, team, whole school) whose members pursue the realization of their own potential for excellence and ethics *and* try to bring out the best in every other person.
- *Self-Study* — engaging students in assessing their strengths and areas for growth in performance character and moral character and in setting goals for improvement.
- *Other-Study* — examining the pathways and products of individuals who demonstrate performance excellence and high moral character and learning to follow their pathways to success.
- *Public Performance/Presentation* — using public performances and presentations to heighten students' responsibility for doing their best work and being their best ethical selves.

Based on our fieldwork with schools in diverse school settings, we have found that the 4 Keys provide a simple template with broad application across grades and subject areas, co-curricular activities, advisories, remedial assistance, youth development programs, and school and classroom discipline. The accompanying box (on page XX) gives examples of how to use these 4 Keys — to improve the quality of education at any school.

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Notes

1 The *Smart & Good High Schools* report (*www. cortland.edu/character/highschool*) elaborates on each of these eight strengths of character: (1) lifelong learner and critical thinker; (2) diligent and capable performer; (3) socially and emotionally skilled person; (4) ethical thinker; (5) respectful and responsible moral agent; (6) self-disciplined person who pursues a healthy lifestyle; (7) contributing community member and democratic citizen; and (8) spiritual person engaged in crafting a life of noble purpose.

2 M. Csisksszentmihalyi, K. Ratunde, & S. Whalen, *Talented teenagers: The roots of success and failure*. (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

3 A. Colby and W. Damon, *Some do care*. (New York: Free Press, 1992).

4 T. Lickona, & M. Davidson. *Smart & good high schools: Integrating excellence and ethics for success in school, work, and beyond*. (Cortland, NY: Center for the 4th and 5th Rs /Washington, DC: Character Education Partnership 2005).

5 K.R.Wentzel, Student motivation in middle school: The role of perceived pedagogical caring. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1997, 89, 3, 411–419.

6 Lickona, T. & M Davidson. *School Culture Inventory*. Cortland, NY: Center for the 4th & 5th Rs (Respect & Responsibility).

7 J. Wooden, *Wooden: A lifetime of observations and reflections on and off the court*. (Lincolnwood, IL: Contemporary Books, 1997).

8 Davidson, M & V. Khmelkov. *Collective Responsibility for Excellence and Ethics (CREE) — For Students & Adults*. Available at, *www.cortland.edu/character*.

9 McCabe, D. "Cheating: Why students do it and how we can help them stop," *American Educator* (Winter 2001).

10 Callahan, D. *The cheating culture*. (New York: Harcourt, 2004).

11 Personal communication, 2006.

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Developing Performance Character and Moral Character:
Applying the 4 Keys

I. Create a Community that Supports and Challenges
- Create a "Compact for Excellence" in every classroom. Involve the class in formulating "Rules for Doing Our Best Work" and "Rules for Treating Each Other with Respect and Care."
- Take a strong stand for integrity in all phases of school life. Involve students in creating a school culture, including an honor code, where integrity is the norm. Use an academic integrity survey to gather data evaluating progress toward that goal.
- Create advisory groups whose members support and challenge each other to pursue goals related to performance character and moral character.

II. Self-Study
- Provide students with regular opportunities to self-assess and establish personal goals related to performance character and moral character.
- At strategic points throughout a course or co-curricular, have students reflect on particular character strengths required for success (*e.g.*, attention to detail, positive attitude, cooperation, perseverance, courage, risk-taking, etc.), rate themselves on these strengths, and set goals for improvement.
- Have students create a personal mission statement describing the person they want to be and the things they want to accomplish in life.

III. Other-Study
- In academic classes, discuss moral and performance character as shown by contemporary, historical, and literary figures. Consider, "What moral and performance character traits helped them achieve what they did?" "What character flaws may have limited their contributions?"
- Invite people of exemplary work ethic from a variety of work settings (carpenters, factory technicians, lawyers, business people, etc.) to discuss their work (*e.g.*, "What do you find satisfying?"), their work ethic (*e.g.*, "How do you approach difficult tasks?"), and how they deal with ethical issues in the workplace.
- Provide students with opportunities to study exemplary pieces of work (writing, history, science, art, music, etc.). Consider, what makes this a great piece of work? What strengths of performance character and moral character do you think enabled the person to create it? What qualities of this finished product or the pathway to this product would you need to utilize in order to create a similar piece of work?

IV. Public Performance
- Provide regular opportunities for students to make their schoolwork public — to peers, the whole school, and the wider community. Within classrooms, cultivate the skills and dispositions necessary for giving and receiving constructive critique. Coach students in how to describe the intended outcome (*e.g.*, "Here's what I was trying to do in this essay.") and the process (*e.g.*, "Here's how I went about trying to achieve my goal.").
- Provide varied opportunities for students to engage in high-quality service learning. Have them discuss: What moral character qualities are needed to serve well? What performance character qualities?
- Use public competitions — choral, art, athletic, forensic — as opportunities to develop the motivation and skills of performance character and moral character. Teach students to view competition as an opportunity to be challenged — by fellow competitors and the task itself — as they pursue their personal best.