

## **Who Should I Become? Using the Positive and the Negative in Character Education**

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How do you determine the content of a moral education curriculum? How do you decide what to include and what to exclude? How do you decide what is positive and what is negative? The Community Voices and Character Education (CVCE) project presents a model for moral education that is based on four ideals: (1) the consensus among leaders worldwide on the necessary characteristics of a citizen in the new century; (2) conclusions from social sciences about what helps humans thrive; (3) the conception of human goodness from moral philosophy; (4) a common morality approach in which the particularities of a community are integrated with research-based principles. Conflicting conclusions among the sources are not viewed as negative, only as uncertain. From these four sources we draw a framework for moral education.

### **What does citizenship in the 21<sup>st</sup> century require of persons?**

The Citizenship Education Policy Study Project (Cogan, 1997) was undertaken to identify the demands of citizenship in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century. Policy experts from nine countries participated and were asked to identify (1) global trends, (2) the necessary characteristics of citizens to enable them to cope with these trends, and (3) educational strategies with which to prepare the citizens. The experts identified global trends such as increased disparities among peoples, a deterioration of the environment, increased consumerism and government control, as well as more regional alliances, fewer systematic mistreatments of marginalized groups, and the necessary adoption of environmentally-friendly methods by business and industry. The list of educational strategies appears in the appendix. In terms of the characteristics a citizen must have for the new century, the experts agreed on these characteristics:

1. Approaches problems as member of a global society
2. Works cooperatively with others and takes responsibility for one's roles and responsibilities in society
3. Understands, accepts, and tolerates cultural differences
4. Thinks in a critical and systematic way
5. Resolves conflict in a non-violent manner
6. Adopts a way of life that protects the environment
7. Respects and defends human rights
8. Participates in public life at all levels of civic discourse
9. Makes full use of information-based technologies.

It is anticipated that if people around the world do not develop these characteristics, there will be considerable trouble around the world. All nine characteristics are incorporated into the CVCE curriculum guidelines.

## **How do the social sciences contribute to what we know about human flourishing?**

In recent years, psychological science has learned quite a lot about human flourishing. In fact, we know that the particular needs required for flourishing change with age and development, and vary to some degree among individuals. For example, there is increasing agreement about many of the findings of developmental psychology and neuropsychology regarding the conditions necessary for children to develop well-functioning personalities. Vital ingredients include a responsive, loving caregiver who ‘converses’ with the infant from the beginning, and stimulates the mind of the infant in numerous ways (e.g., reading books to the child). Such caregiver behaviors create a strong attachment and a sense of security and build the brain in ways helpful for schooling and getting along with others. We know that the brains of children who experience neglect or violence are ‘built’ differently from such experiences. So the negation of the factors that contribute to development have noticeable, measurable effects on children.

Positive psychology identifies particular factors that are generally related to positive outcomes and mental health. For example, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) identify courage, future mindedness, optimism, interpersonal skill, faith, work ethic, hope, honesty, and perseverance. This is a list of both personal and social skills that enhance relationships, required because humans are highly dependent on other humans. Our model includes skills necessary for social and psychological flourishing.

We also have learned a great deal about what makes humans not get along with one another. For example, human brains are designed to respond to the world in particular limited ways that functioned well in a simpler society. Researchers are finding that what works for survival in a circumscribed environment (e.g., quickly interpreting sensory input based on previous experience and jumping to conclusions), in a more complex world such as ours leads to inaccurate and often biased perceptions. These limitations have implications for how we think about morality. Humans are by nature biased observers and judges. They are constrained by an information processing system that generalizes, prefers the familiar, and recoils from difference. Any moral education program must make evident these biases and nurture the means to control them. CVCE does so.

## **What is the conception of human goodness as conceived by moral philosophers?**

Every society must respond to the question ‘Why be moral?’ McKinnon (1999) contends that ‘morality is needed to evaluate desires and to adjudicate between desires (p. 5).’ Simply put, morality is something everyone must learn in order to get along in a society.

The morality of persons has been defined in ways that are primarily represented by Aristotle and Kant. Aristotle defined a good person as one who has cultivated a set of virtues for the good life. Kant believed that the good person is one who respects persons and applies the categorical imperative. More recently, philosophers such as Flanagan and Johnson have emphasized the importance of integrating human psychology into a moral philosophy.

As psychologists, we believe that the normative claims of a moral theory ought to relate the characteristics of a good person to the characteristics of a well-functioning person. We agree with McKinnon’s (1999) proposal for a functionalistic naturalism:

“Given their nature, humans have certain quintessentially human needs and human abilities. These [are] relevant in determining what counts as a good human life. The point of morality is to assist us in leading better human lives, so we need to understand how our nature constrains what counts as a good human life... The normative component of ethics

will be seen to emerge from certain natural facts about human beings and from the ways in which these facts constrain what counts as a good human life.” (p. 6)

The philosophical and psychological foundations of a moral education theory must directly connect to the daily experience of an individual in a practical way. What is necessary for successful functioning? A practical focus requires an operationalization of optimal functioning.

“Just identifying what counts as a ‘fact’ about human nature may seem problematic unless a particular background theory about a good human life is adopted. If the set of relevant facts about human nature is taken, not to *determine* what counts as a good human life, but at best to *constrain* it, then a looseness of fit between criteria that specify which facts of human nature are relevant and preferred stories about good human lives becomes apparent. The appeal to natural facts about human beings serves to rule out some choices of kinds of lives as non-optimal. p11

The optimal life rules out choices that we know are harmful to humans (e.g., violence), as identified by psychology. Positive psychology contributes significantly to the vision of a good person. It points to the development of personal and social skills that support human relationships and human thriving. CVCE incorporates such a set of skills.

### **What is a common morality approach?**

In modernity, religious traditions have melted in the heat (and sometimes light) of modern rationality and science. No longer does the authority of any tradition command respect per se. Instead, reason and perspective tear particularity into unrecognizable forms of inclusion. Yet the answer to ‘why be good?’ requires an immutable soul-grabbing command. If we live in an era parched for the sacrosanct, why be good? Whence the sacred command?

Some scholars have proposed replacements for faith’s clear demands for goodness. Hunter (1994, 2000), a sociologist, suggests that we can (only) find the answer in the particularities that we bring to a civic dialogue.

“Character outside of a lived community, the entanglements of complex social relationships, and their shared story, is impossible.” (2000, p. 227)

“...instead of forcing commonality in our moral discourse at the expense of particularity, one *discovers* commonality *through* particularity. (ibid., p. 230)

In defining the moral life, the particular community provides the moral convictions and framework for specifying moral skills. Thus, optimal functioning is grounded in the specific context of the individual and his or her community. That is, the community must dialogue about the specific forms or manifestations of optimal human functioning. For example, how does one show respect? Each community will have a variant response. Although the principle of respect may be the same across communities, the specific implementations and manifestations will differ.

### **How should a moral education program be structured?**

The Community Voices and Character Education (CVCE) project presents a model for character education that contrasts with most models. It has these characteristics:

1. It emphasizes the development of ethical skills rather than the learning of dispositional traits.
2. It incorporates constructivist views of teaching and learning using structured experience in helping novices move toward expertise.
3. It empowers the student with the grave responsibility of constructing a self.

4. It embeds character education across the curriculum rather than being an add-on program.
  5. It specifies the importance of adjusting the framework to community contexts.
- Several of these characteristics will be described and then discussed in terms of how they approach the positive and negative.

(1) It emphasizes the development of ethical skills rather than the learning of dispositional traits.

Whereas most character education programs tacitly endorse a trait understanding of character, a view not actually held by contemporary personality theorists, the present model bases its understanding of character on well-attested literatures in cognitive science. Character development is, according to this view, not a matter of developing traits of character, but rather a matter of developing a set of component skills to levels of expertise. Hence, individuals who have good moral character are more expert in the exercise of certain foundational skills, rather than being in possession of certain personality traits. Whereas most character education programs rely upon a “transmission model” of teaching and learning—a model that assumes that teaching is a matter of adults handing off knowledge to passive “learners”—the present model is based upon constructivist principles that guide “best practice” instruction. This view assumes that individuals are active constructors of meaning. It assumes that individuals build conceptual frameworks, both declarative and procedural, in the process of making sense of one’s experience. Moreover, whereas most character education programs rest on thin empirical evidence, the this model is attested by a voluminous literature and rests on important research traditions in moral development research. Whereas most programs are founded upon questionable human psychology, this model stands on firm psychological research and theory, incorporating a dynamic view of ethical behavior, skills, and processes.

Character development is, according to this view, not a matter of developing traits of character, but rather developing a set of inter and intrapersonal skills that build proficiency towards expertise. Instead of espousing a trait approach, like Robert Sternberg (1998) and others we prefer to think of the characteristics of an ethical person as an interplay of skills.

Using a concrete view of ethical behavioral processes (ethical sensitivity, judgment, motivation, and action), each process is parsed into skill categories which are teachable, assessable, and can be taught in regular subjects across the curriculum. Although most CVCE skills are labeled in terms of positive behaviors, a person of character must contend with the circumstances that pull him or her in contrary directions, both positive and negative.

(2) It incorporates constructivist views of teaching and learning using structured experience in helping novices move toward expertise.

Traditional character educators view moral themes (and moral virtues) like biological gene packets that are passed from one generation to the next. Consequently, they seem to be stuck in a 19<sup>th</sup> century understanding of human development and learning. They appear ignorant of current knowledge about human learning that emphasizes such things as the construction of meaning and building representations.

The Community Voices and Character Education (CVCE) project framework uses novice-to-expert skill building rather than the more traditional ‘character trait’ approach to character education. Expertise is a dominant focus among researchers in human learning (e.g., Ericsson & Smith, 1991), in particular the view of a learner as a novice gaining expertise (e.g., Sternberg, 1999). According to this view, human learning proceeds along a continuum between novice status and expert status. Experts are different from novices. We’ve learned that experts

are different from novices in several important ways. Unlike novices, experts know what knowledge to access, which procedures to apply, how to apply them and when. According to Sternberg (1998), experts have (a) large, rich, organized networks of concepts (schemas) containing a great deal of declarative knowledge about the domain; (b) well-organized, higher interconnected units of knowledge in the domain.

The distinction between novice and expert is relevant in the moral domain as well (e.g., Narvaez, 1999). Applying the novice-to-expert orientation to our model, in every process and skill area, experts perform in a superior manner. Experts in *Ethical Sensitivity* are able to more quickly and accurately ‘read’ a situation and determine what role they might play. These experts are also better at generating usable solutions because of their greater understanding of the consequences of possible actions. Experts in *Ethical Judgment* are more skilled in solving complex problems, seeing the crux of a problem quickly and bringing with them many schemas for reasoning about what to do. Their information processing tools are more complex but also more efficient. Experts in *Ethical Motivation* are skilled at maintaining their focus on prioritizing the ethical ideal. Their motivation is directed by an organized structure of moral self-identity. Experts in *Ethical Action* are able to keep themselves focused and take the necessary steps to get the ethical job done. They demonstrate superior performance when completing an ethical action.

*Using the positive and negative.* Addressing the ends of the continuum of excellence is a necessary element in teaching novices to be experts. When one learns about being ethically sensitive, one must see examples of both insensitivity and sensitivity. Students must see the harm of insensitivity and the benefits of sensitivity.

### (3) It empowers the student with the grave responsibility of constructing a self.

A model for character education cannot be described without including the most important contextual variable: the students. Students will have different needs and interests, levels of development and areas of skill. Yet they have in common what we all have in common. Each of us ultimately makes the decisions about who and what we will become. Our decisions shape our characters and our futures. The ‘constructing expertise’ model helps students develop the skills for good choices but puts the onus on their shoulders for making the final decisions about their behavior.

In CVCE, the central questions for the students are “Who should I be” and “What do I want to become?” In the words of Christine McKinnon, individuals must ‘do the work necessary for constructing a character’ (*Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices*, 1999, p. 42). Christine McKinnon states that humans are “the kinds of beings who invest their lives with meaning by creating a self which identifies them as the kind of person they are and which provides a unifying link to the various facets of their lives” (p. 42). McKinnon also states that “the person of integrity has a self-reflexive concern with the compatibility and consistency of her many different traits and interests.” (p. 38)

How do we view the challenge of self construction? As the main task of a human being. So how do you work on the good self? Look at the chart for how we have conceptualized it. The CVCE curriculum guidelines for teachers present skills that are integral to practical reasoning. (The four processes and their skills are listed in Table 1.) These skills include aspects of personal development-- necessary for a good life, and aspects of social development-- necessary for acting ethically.

The CVCE skills are listed in their positive sense, yet in order to understand and nurture them in the classroom, their negation or opposites must be discussed. That is, in order to learn

the skills, teachers and students need to discuss the consequences and effects of not having the skills. For example, Christine McKinnon (Character, Virtue Theories, and the Vices, 1999) describes wickedness in the following way:

“What has gone wrong is that insufficient or unsuccessful attention has been paid to the task of constructing a self, of developing a character, of cultivating the right kinds of desires and interests, and of learning to take pleasure in the pursuit....The conceptual point remains that the functionally best kind of human life involves much critical evaluation and self-reflexive awareness and practice in the making of a self. Human lives deficient in these respects will be less than good human lives” (p. 43).

The integration of skills across processes and within unique situations is a lifelong task. Our program seeks to get children off on the right foot to taking interest in their characters, and to take on the task, in McKinnon’s words, of “constructing a self...of cultivating the right kinds of desires and interests, of learning to take pleasure in the pursuit”. The self envisioned by the CVCE project is a self prepared to participate in a multicultural pluralistic democracy.

(4) It embeds character education across the curriculum rather than being an add-on program.

When the research framework is applied in a particular context, the ‘constructing expertise’ model is in action. Although contexts of implementation will always vary, one of the absolutes of implementation is the embedding of character education into regular instruction. This should happen in every subject area. We believe that character education should not stand alone but be incorporated into the entire spectrum of education for students. Ethics pervades our everyday lives, and it should be the same for students in school. Regardless of the curriculum, teachers can always raise issues of ethics (sensitivity, judgment, motivation, action) in lessons.

(7) It specifies the importance of adjusting the framework to community contexts.

In this approach we encourage a type of ‘common morality’ in deciding on the specific forms of functioning to be addressed. That is, we researchers present a set of guidelines for optimal functioning that we have culled from research and scholarship (top-down educational framework). This set of guidelines includes fundamental assumptions about the purpose of schooling (to nurture effective global citizens) and a set of skills for individuals to learn.

The guidelines are presented to each community and each community discusses them in terms of specific community needs and diversity (bottom-up educational framework). As a critical ‘bottom up’ feature, the skill categories are to be embedded in the cultural context where they are taught. To some degree, each community has its own understanding of the skills. For example, ‘respecting others’ can be expressed in various ways, as we know from cultures around the world. Likewise, identifying ethical problems and possible actions may vary among communities. The project design encourages that the actual day-to-day practice of the skills be determined on site, by the community. The teacher is encouraged to work with the community on how to teach the skills and what to emphasize. The teacher tailors the classroom work to the local understanding of the skill. Further, the student is encouraged to gather information about the skill from the community (parents, elders) and bring back that information to the classroom. There will be various interpretations of the skills because of diversity in culture, religion, socio-economic status, regional background, and so on. When this diversity is brought into the classroom by the students themselves, it provides an appropriate backdrop for dialogue about the implementation of ethical skills and for teaching respect for differences. It can also be an

important demonstration of how groups may have different practices while having the same underlying value. This top-down and bottom-up combination allows each community to have its mark on the set of guidelines but within certain parameters, of optimal functioning within a pluralistic democracy.

Table 1.  
Ethical Processes and Skills for Practical Reasoning and Functional Ethics

<b><i>PROCESS CATEGORY</i></b>	<b><i>Possible Negative/ Opposite</i></b>
<b><i>ETHICAL SENSITIVITY</i></b>	
ES-1: Reading and Expressing Emotion	Violence
ES-2: Caring by Connecting to Others	Apathy, Disdain
ES-3: Working with group and interpersonal differences	Hate
ES-4: Taking the Perspectives of Others	Narcissism, Delusions
ES-5: Controlling Social Bias	Genocide
ES-6: Identifying Options and Interpretations	Rigidity
ES-7: Identifying the Consequences of Actions and Options	Recklessness
<b><i>ETHICAL JUDGMENT</i></b>	
EJ-1: Developing General Reasoning Skills	Manipulable
EJ-2: Developing Ethical Reasoning Skills	Self-centered
EJ-3: Understanding Ethical Problems	Disregard
EJ-4: Using Codes and Identifying Judgment Criteria	Resentment
EJ-5: Reflecting on the Process and Outcome	No growth
EJ-6: Planning to Implement Decisions	No follow through
EJ-7: Developing Optimism	Nihilism
<b><i>ETHICAL MOTIVATION</i></b>	
EM-1: Respecting Others	Contempt
EM-2: Developing Conscience	Sociopathy
EM-3: Acting Responsibly	Careless
EM-4: Helping Others	Miserly
EM-5: Making Peace and Cooperating	Violence
EM-6: Valuing Traditions and Institutions	Anarchy
EM-7: Developing Ethical Identity And Integrity	
<b><i>ETHICAL ACTION</i></b>	
EC-1: Communicating Well	Violence
EC-2: Resolving Conflicts and Problems	Violence
EC-3: Identifying Needs and Acting Assertively	Violence rules
EC-4: Taking Initiative as a Leader	Extremes rule
EC-5: Developing Courage	Cowardice
EC-6: Developing Perseverance	Disdain
EC-7: Working Hard	Unaccomplished

***Process 1: ETHICAL SENSITIVITY***

**Skill and Sub-skills**

**Usage of Negative Content**

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ES-1: Reading and Expressing Emotion  
Identifying emotions  
Expressing emotions.

Show otherwise poor outcomes  
What happens when you misidentify?  
What happens when you mis express?

ES-2: Caring by Connecting to Others  
Relations with others  
Showing Care  
Friendship

Show otherwise poor outcomes

ES-3: Working with Group and Individual Differences  
Becoming multicultural  
Working with diversity in our community

Show otherwise poor outcomes  
Countering parochial instincts  
Countering out-group negation

ES-4: Taking the Perspectives of Others  
Making inferences to take another's perspective  
Using culture knowledge to take another's perspective

Show otherwise poor outcomes

ES-5: Controlling Social Bias  
Examining bias  
Preventing bias

Show otherwise poor outcomes

Working against negative instincts

ES-6: Generating Optional Actions  
Generating multiple interpretations of an event/situation  
Generating multiple options for action

Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes

ES-7: Identifying Consequences of Actions and Options  
Caring about consequences  
Types of consequences to consider

Show otherwise poor outcomes  
Avoiding negative consequences  
Working for positive consequences

*Process 2: ETHICAL MOTIVATION*

<b>Skill and Sub-skills</b>	<b>Negative content</b>
EM-1: Respecting Others Developing civility Becoming trustworthy Reverence	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EM-2: Developing Conscience Self Command ( <u>the motivation side</u> like seeking to avoid temptation Self-awareness (self-knowledge in terms of motivations, needs, feelings) Temperance (seeking to avoid extremism)	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EM-3: Acting Responsibly Meeting obligations Generosity Stewardship	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EM-4: Helping Others Sharing resources Mentoring Choosing service	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes
EM-5: Making Peace and Cooperating Peacemaking Cooperating Forgiving GRATITUDE?	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EM-6: Valuing Social Structures Identifying and Valuing Traditions Understanding Social Structures Practicing Democracy	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EM-7: Developing Ethical Identity and Integrity Respecting Self Creating an Identity Reaching Your Potential	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes

*Process 3: ETHICAL JUDGMENT*

<b>Skill and Sub-skills</b>	<b>Usage of Negative Content</b>
EJ-1: Developing General Reasoning Skills	Show otherwise poor outcomes
Reasoning objectively Using sound reasoning Avoiding human reasoning pitfalls	
EJ-2: Developing Ethical Reasoning Skills	Show otherwise poor outcomes
Judging perspectives Reasoning about standards and ideals Reasoning about outcomes	
EJ-3: Understanding Ethical Problems	Show otherwise poor outcomes
Gathering information Categorizing problems Analyzing ethical problems	
EJ-4: Using Codes and Identifying Judgment Criteria	Show otherwise poor outcomes
Characterizing codes Discerning code application Judging code validity	
EJ-5: Reflecting on the Process and Outcome	Show otherwise poor outcomes
Monitoring one's reasoning Reasoning about means and ends	
EJ-6: Planning To Implement Decisions	Show otherwise poor outcomes
Thinking strategically Implementing successfully Determining resource use	
EJ-7: Developing Optimism	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes
Applying positive reasoning skills in personal social situations Modifying affect in thinking Attributing	

*Process 4: ETHICAL ACTION*

<b>Skill and Sub-skills</b>	<b>Usage of Negative Content</b>
EA-1: Communicating Well  Speaking and Listening Non-verbal and Alternative Communication Monitoring Communication	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EA-2: Resolving Conflicts and Problems  Problem Solving Negotiation Skills Anti-Violence Skills	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EA-3: Identifying Needs and Acting Assertively Identify Human Needs Build Communication Styles Practice Assertiveness	Show otherwise poor outcomes
EA-4: Taking Initiative as a Leader  Learning leadership styles Taking initiative for others Making decisions for groups	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes
EA-5: Developing Courage  Overcoming fear Standing up against the crowd	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes
EA-6: Developing Perseverance  Self-control Overcoming obstacles Pushing oneself (self-efficacy)	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes
EA-7: Working Hard  Working for excellence (Being thorough) Setting reachable goals Focusing (Being steadfast)	Show otherwise less than optimal outcomes

Table 3.

## Ethical Processes and Skills for Practical Reasoning and Functional Ethics

<b><i>PROCESS CATEGORY</i></b>	<b><i>FOCUS</i></b>
<b><i>ETHICAL SENSITIVITY</i></b>	
ES-1: Reading and Expressing Emotion	Social, Spiritual
ES-2: Caring by Connecting to Others	Social, Spiritual
ES-3: Working with group and interpersonal differences	Social, Mental
ES-4: Taking the Perspectives of Others	Social, Mental
ES-5: Controlling Social Bias	Social, Mental
ES-6: Identifying Options and Interpretations	Social, Mental
ES-7: Identifying the Consequences of Actions and Options	Social, Mental
<b><i>ETHICAL JUDGMENT</i></b>	
EJ-1: Developing General Reasoning Skills	Mental
EJ-2: Developing Ethical Reasoning Skills	Mental, Social
EJ-3: Understanding Ethical Problems	Mental, Social
EJ-4: Using Codes and Identifying Judgment Criteria	Mental, Social
EJ-5: Reflecting on the Process and Outcome	Mental
EJ-6: Planning to Implement Decisions	Mental
EJ-7: Developing Optimism	Mental, Spiritual
<b><i>ETHICAL MOTIVATION</i></b>	
EM-1: Respecting Others	Social, Spiritual
EM-2: Developing Conscience	Social, Mental, Spiritual
EM-3: Acting Responsibly	Social, Mental, Spiritual
EM-4: Helping Others	Social
EM-5: Making Peace and Cooperating	Social, Mental, Spiritual
EM-6: Valuing Traditions and Institutions	Social, Spiritual
EM-7: Developing Ethical Identity And Integrity	Spiritual, Mental
<b><i>ETHICAL ACTION</i></b>	
EC-1: Communicating Well	Social, Physical
EC-2: Resolving Conflicts and Problems	Social, Mental
EC-3: Identifying Needs and Acting Assertively	Mental, Social
EC-4: Taking Initiative as a Leader	Mental, Social
EC-5: Developing Courage	Mental, Physical
EC-6: Developing Perseverance	Mental, Physical
EC-7: Working Hard	Mental, Physical

## Confronting the negative of the media

In days past, children in the context of religious education were told what kind of human being they should be (and they were physically punished if they strayed). The messages kids hear most these days are from the media directly and indirectly through their peers.

So character and moral education must prepare children to confront the media. In the context of the current free market system children—and adults--- can be victimized by it if they are not media wise. They are victimized by not realizing the impact it has subconsciously in terms of priming certain perspectives, making norms (e.g., people who watch more tv tend to think of the world as a more dangerous place than others).

There are many negatives presented in the media, often because the media generally appeals to the baser instincts in an effort to sell itself or its sponsor. As we all know, the media these days emphasizes immediate self-gratification (just do it; you deserve a break today) and urges attention to physical good looks and sex. Of course by themselves these are not negative. But in the context of a life where most consistent messages are of this sort, these messages are negative. They portray character as a matter of self-assertion in order to gratify physical needs for social gain. Little support is given for a simple life in which spiritual or intellectual needs are primary. So it is hard to find a balance. Messages like these accumulate like detritus in the minds of children, making it difficult to help them take control of their character.

The following diagram is an illustration of the emphases the author sees in the present dominant youth culture.

<b>Physical</b>	<b>Social</b>
<b>Spiritual</b>	<b>Mental</b>

### McKinnon says

“Usually, the wicked agent not only fails to act well with respect to her fellow persons, but she also undervalues herself and her own life. Sometimes she does not value herself at all: she makes no assessments along ethical dimensions of any of her desires or inclinations. Sometimes she values herself inadequately: she does not see herself as a potential character, as needing to construct a self with a particular identity. She sees

herself only as an ends-maximizer. Because her rational faculties engage only in this narrow kind of instrumental reasoning, she fails to recognize what is good for humans, including herself. Sometimes she does not sufficiently recognize the role that choices and actions play in the making of a self, and so she allows herself to be convinced of their relative unimportance. Sometimes vicious persons do not think enough about other people because they do not think enough about themselves (about the kind of being that they are) or about the nature of persons generally.” (p. 50)

This lack of center in the wicked person may be what propels the self-esteem curricula in schools today. McKinnon is not advocating for these self-esteem programs. No, these programs encourage the individual to think of themselves as valuable as they are (encouraging bullies). They encourage the individual to make decisions that have good outcomes for themselves. This encourages narcissism rather than a valuing of self within the context of the larger picture. Rarely is the appropriate context given to the child: that what kind of being she is really does matter to humanity and to the world. That she must attend to creating the kind of being that acts with such an awareness--that what she does in her life has an impact.

CVCE processes and skills layout the parameters of the good self to construct and what to learn to get there. A self is sensitive, motivated, makes good decisions and takes good actions.

Instead of the chronic images of narcissism and disregard for others so common to media culture, CVCE attempts to prime students for ethical identity. There is evidence that people who chronically activate moral schemas see the world differently (Lapsley & Lasky, 2001).

Issues:

Defining what is negative/positive

Personally-psychologically: developmentally

Culturally: sex roles

Epoc-wise: How bad is it (generational perceptions)?  
violence in media

Politically: The new administration in the U.S. sees environmentalism as “green tape”

Do we need evil?

Who defines it? Adults? Which adults?

Character educators

Right wing (John Ashcroft)

Left wing (Nader)

Defining character

Psychologically

Spiritually?

How viewpoints are influenced by context:

Subconsciously: Priming (e.g., accessibility) discourse norms

How identity influences viewpoint (stigma and teasing articles)

Character Education: CVCE definition

Context: Who should I be?

Methods

Address it all

For right wing: don't talk about it

*Under what conditions can students make meaningful learning processes from confronting the bad?*

*What is the role of a teacher in it?*

*What are the effects of group processes?*

*How do the national culture, the subculture and the ethnic cultures influence these learning processes?*

Problem of culture: like air, you can't see it, don't pay attention to it, don't realize how much it influences you

Youth culture: largely created by media and business: consumerism, self expression, instant gratification,

What is negative?

My definition: negative is something that harms the flourishing of life

Contextual importance (e.g. yelling at a football game is fine, but not at church)  
Human flourishing relies on principles as in the UN Declaration of Human Rights  
fulfillment of basic needs (e.g., food, water)  
individual opportunity for a democratic life  
    freedom of choice of who to be within positive parameters  
within the context of personal and community support

But the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

### **Problems of**

#### Must fight cognitive veil in US:

Infusion of media into everyday thinking  
News has violent images as matter of course  
Donor fatigue /compassion fatigue  
Lifestyle of the very rich as goal of ordinary citizen  
Television numbing  
Unreliable media sources  
Underground right wing extremism  
Political discussion is series of adversarial soundbites and spin  
    (no full disclosure or depth)  
Hate groups websites garnering unprecedented number of members  
Power/money rule

#### U.S. culture:

Orientation towards instant gratification and comfort  
Little thought for rest of the world (5% consuming 25% of resources)  
Predominance of individual rights (as long as it doesn't directly harm another human)  
View that I'm different from everyone else, I make my own decisions (no one influences me without my consent)

If wealthy control the media, the discourse,  
And people desire to be like the rich  
how do we tell kids to 'see' those who control their values as bad?

#### Bad is promulgated to be:

Those who argue against freedom of expression  
Those who argue for specific social supports for families and children  
Those against the supremacy of individual liberty

#### Role models are

Determined by media: celebrities, wealthy  
Aspirations limited to acquisitional, consumerism (what else do they see?)

#### Relevant research findings:

**Unconscious influence of (these days mostly negative) behaviors (priming)**

Media

Adversarial discourse  
Confirmatory bias  
Seduction of metaphors (eg Lakoff re gulf war)  
\*Make the unconscious conscious

Historical alliance of business, bias, law against minority or power challenged

### What can be done under the circumstances

Using negatives:  
What negatives?

Lashing out:

\*Use shocking crimes

Hate crimes: Matthew Knutson, Texas man) to bring up negative

Overt racism and overt homosexuality is frowned upon in media

Crimes from bullying: school shootings

Imbalance

\*Consider shocking perspectives:

Examine websites of hate groups (deconstruct) (group identity to extreme level)

Disparities

\*International perspectives (ideals with realities)

UN rights of child

UN human rights

Bias

\*Increase understanding of

Ethnocentrism

Human biases (e.g., familiar)

Multiple causality

### Negatives should be couched in positive context of ethical ideals:

Couch answer to 'who should I be' in context of family:

What would your mentor-adult want for you?

Use 4 process chart (ex of good and bad)

Balance, the Golden Mean

How does the negative influence us?

What is negative?

Global level: Disharmony and fear

Societal level: Values and goals dictated by media

\*Media refusal skills

Neighborhood level: Social mobility

Family level: little time together, little supervision

Interpersonal level: Impatience, shallowness

Personal level: consumerism

On the other hand, Martin Seligman argues that the society is infused with pessimism and that the media perpetuate it.

\*Optimistic thinking

\*Balance.

\*All can benefit from attention to cultivating one's character. How? CVCE

Current programs in character and moral education tend to focus on the development of positive qualities: Be honest, Be respectful of authority, Be responsible to your group. Focus on your goals. On a superficial level, these sound fine. But if one thinks a little more carefully, pitfalls are visible.

Is it always good to be honest? Should you always tell people what you think and feel? What kind of honesty is good?

Is it good always to be respectful of authority?

Is it good always to be responsible to your group?

If one always focuses on one's goals,

We can all think of instances in which these behaviors are not good.

How does one bring in the bad instances?

## References

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Appendix  
From the report pp 10-11

Educational Strategies/Approaches/Innovations agreed upon by the experts in the xx study:  
\*\*numbers 1,2,3,9,11&14 are met in the CVCE model

Very highly recommended:

- 1. Support the teaching of subject matter in a manner that encourages children to think critically. \*\***
- 2. Emphasize students' ability to critically assess information in an increasingly media-based society. \*\***

Highly recommended:

- 3. Establish a curriculum which uses the potential of information-based technologies. \*\***
4. Establish extensive international links among educational institutions at all levels to support international studies, and research and curriculum development focusing on citizenship education.
5. Cultivate a population of teachers with international experience and cross-cultural sensitivity.
6. Implement programs of international student exchange in order to promote mutual understandings among different cultures.
7. Increase attention to global issues and international studies in the curriculum.
8. Establish extensive liaisons and joint projects among schools and other social institutions (e.g., industry, NGOs, churches, community groups) to support education.
- 9. Require that opportunities for community action and involvement be an important feature of the school curriculum. \*\***
10. Promote schools as active centers of community life and as agents for community development.
- 11. Decentralize decision making so that local communities and individual schools have considerable control of curriculum and educational administration. \*\***
- 12. Increase opportunities for students to be involved in cooperative learning activities. \*\***
13. Require that the mass media act in a socially responsible, educative manner.

**14. Implement programs that effectively use the talents and skills of an aging population.**

\*\*

15. Demand that all major social institutions and their officials set high standards of civic responsibility.
16. Ensure that all social institutions (including the family, and educational and religious institutions) have an abiding respect for the basic rights of children and contribute to their well-being.



Living well together, dependent on the understanding of self and others, and effectively dealing with the complexities of existence, are at the heart of a moral life. Yet human *nature* constrains the possibilities of morality (e.g., we shall never be uncontradictorally moral). At the same time, human *well being* points us to the goals of morality. We discuss a model that is grounded in the nature of humanity and its well being.

Although I am a psychologist by training, I attempt to outline the philosophical underpinnings of the Expertise model. I hope that philosophers would keep my amateur status in mind and kindly overlook my necessarily superficial discussion of some very deep and controversial issues in moral philosophy.

Can we skip over the philosophical debate between cognitivists, who emphasize the existence of moral truth, and noncognitivists, who emphasize the subjective experience?

*One of the most troubling findings for moral philosophy from cognitive science is the great extent to which individuals make decisions and act without conscious awareness. For example, there is evidence that the body often plans its movement (based on neuronal and biochemical data) before a conscious decision is made (see Cotterill, Gazaniga). There is evidence that the body is largely ruled by biochemical reactions (Damasio). In fact, there is evidence that moral judgments occur at speeds faster than conscious awareness (Narvaez & Endicott). Some have argued (Cotterill, H///) that the only characteristic that distinguishes humans from other animals is the ability to quell instinctive, automatic behavior.*

*What is a good person in a totalitarian society may not be what is a good person in a pluralistic democracy. What is a good person in one time period may not be one in another time period. Note the change in U.S. in attitudes towards slavery. A southerner in the 17<sup>th</sup> century who owned slaves was not necessarily a bad person.*

*This model, coincidentally, incorporates the triumvirate of current goals of moral education: civic virtues, personal virtues, psychological development  
Yet on what foundation do they stand? .....*

for reasons such as those supplied by Catherine McKinnon (1999):  
“The fact that humans are highly social creatures means that the well-being of others will be a factor in considering which choices contribute to a well-led human life and which choices distract from such a life.” p2

Labeling a complex set of behaviors with a single word does not help the novice. For example, if you tell a person who is learning to be a cook to ‘make a white sauce,’ he or she will be at a loss on how to proceed. Likewise, if you tell a child ‘be trustworthy,’ the child will be at a loss on how to be so.

Let’s say you have a list of behavioral characteristics of good cooks:

- Makes white sauce
- Slices, dices and juliennes
- Tempers eggs
- Formulates proper soup base
- Roasts to perfection
- Can marinade and flambe

Does this list help you learn to become a good cook? Not hardly. Each of these characteristics exemplifies a whole set of understandings and behaviors. For example,

making a white sauce requires, among other things, an understanding of fats and their interaction with starches and both with temperature.

Consider this sample list of behavioral characteristics of good or ethical people:

- Is loyal
- Is honest
- Is trustworthy
- Is responsible
- Is compassionate

Like the list of good cook characteristics, this list leaves out all the underpinnings of what is described. Therefore, for a novice, it is hardly any help at all.

Besides describing a plethora of behaviors and understandings with single words, lists of traits provide no information on how all the traits fit together. How does knowing the trait list help make one a good cook? We can suppose that a highly motivated novice will go and find out about white sauces, spending time in the library, finding time to watch cooks and ask questions, and so on. We can hardly expect students to do the same with a list of character traits. And, besides, there are no recipe books in the library that describe the step-by-step process to becoming loyal. Indeed, loyalty is a far more complex concept than making white sauce!

Adults may find the trait list helpful because they have had a lifetime of experience building knowledge about those behaviors. When you mention ‘honesty’ to an adult, chances are that he or she recalls many personal experiences of being lied to, of lying, of the consequences of lying, of the degrees of honesty one displays based on the level of intimacy with another, of the differences between honesty and being private or polite. The label, ‘honesty,’ is convenient for the adult in chunking all these experiences in memory. Adults are not novices when it comes to honesty, whereas most children are.

On the other hand, a child has had relatively few experiences, and fewer yet that are recalled when the trait ‘honesty’ is mentioned. Further, these experiences may not have been reflected upon, and hence may remain close to the heart and closed to mental scrutiny. Advising a child to have the trait is talking at the child and more likely than not has no effect on their skills or character development.

In short, we believe that the trait approach is understandable, convenient, and easy for adults in speaking about ethical behavior because the terms evoke whole sets of personal memories and understandings. In contrast, for young people trying to grow into ethical people, the trait approach can be remote, unhelpful, and superficial. A superficial understanding of something can be damaging as the person may think they know all about something when they know next to nothing. If one asks the question, ‘How do you describe a person who is good at ethical sensitivity (or ethical judgment, or ethical motivation, or ethical action), one will generate a list of basic abilities or skills. For example, an ethically sensitive person can do such things as (a) read and express emotion, (b) care for others, (c) control social bias, (d) identify options and intentions. In a similar way, we attempt to operationalize each process in the Four-Component Model, generating a set of teachable skills. Concrete and teachable, the skills are based on research and scholarship. The skills include elements of basic socialization, altruism, and psychological health. Although we parcel each of the four processes into seven skill categories, the categories are not exhaustive. There are other aspects of each process that are impractical to

teach or assess in a classroom, or that are difficult to implement in a U.S. public school. Each ethical situation requires a different set of skills and subskills, some of which we delineate (see Narvaez et al 2001), others of which need to be determined by the local community in which the framework is implemented. See Table 1 for a list of the skills for each process.

Not only are the skills necessary in and of themselves, it takes skill to integrate them and to use them in proper proportions at the right times.

We looked for moral goals---objectives by looking at experts. What do moral experts do? What do they do that novices can't? By focusing on the construction of skills for optimal functioning within a democracy. What does a person with optimal skills look like? Damon and Colby, The altruistic personality, rescuers...

Does this happen only with platitudes about being honest, trustworthy and responsible? We think not. In order to construct the self, one must have some idea of what structures are necessary and what tools are available. One can deduce the necessary characteristics by looking at the skills of those who live optimal and non-optimal human lives.

What kinds of lives are non-optimal? We would suggest that lives that include suffering due to a misuse of substances, poor communication skills (leading to abusive relationships), lack of impulse control, poor choices, a sense of helplessness---these lives are less optimal than the life we envision is optimal.

A person with optimal skills looks like a good human being. They have good character---a sense of integrity and identity. They have good reasoning skills, they have a good sense of self. They are proactive and involved in community, in part because of a sense of self-efficacy. But this isn't specific enough.

Being honest of course is not a question of whether or not to be truthful. It's a matter of deciding how truthful to be, where, and with whom, under what circumstances. How is this decided? With knowledge of the cultural bounds of the situation, the perspectives of those involved, the codes of the context, the motivation to be respectful and responsible, to help others and make peace---all of which require developing sets of subskills.

What is positive and what is negative? Very often this is a contextual issue. For example, one skill we suggest is that of reading and sharing emotion, learning how to do so according to the cultural context. Sharing emotions can be positive or negative depending on the situation and what is being shared. How one shares emotion is important culturally and contextually. For example, .....

Fascination with moral stories---why? How did the character deal with the obstacles of life? Psychiatrists recommend that patients watch soap operas to learn consequences, choices... Recent research: people comprehend moral stories better than non moral---can extract meaning.

McKinnon: "To know [a person's] character is to know more than what she is disposed to do: it is to know *why* she will choose what she does and *why* she will want to do as she does." P. 36

Balance

Care with assertiveness

Respect for tradition with controlling bias

Respect for codes and laws with courage, initiative

Identity and integrity with perspective taking

What motivates the student in the expertise moral education program? Two things: The classic question that is at the center of the program: Who shall I become? And citizenship, that for which we believe the students are being educated. How can I best thrive and simultaneously create a nurturing, sustainable community for all

