From Tom Lickona's *CHARACTER MATTERS* (2/04)

Help Kids (and Adults)Take Responsibility For Building Their Own Character

Parents can only give good advice or put their children on the right path. The final forming of a person's character lies in their own hands.

—Anne Frank

Most adults, including most teachers, don't see themselves as engaged in their own moral growth.

—Rick Weissbourd

To ensure progressive growth in the moral life, we must first know ourselves. We must know our particular faults and failings, as well as our strengths and progress in trying to lead a good life. We gain this self-knowledge by continually examining our behavior and reflecting on the kind of person we are and would like to be. "The unexamined life is not worth living," as Socrates said, because only by examining our life can we improve it.

Besides knowing ourselves, we must also make a sincere effort to become a better person—more patient, more sensitive to the needs of others, quicker to forgive, more willing to admit when we're wrong. We must persist in this effort even when we fail, as we surely will.

Finally, we must ask, are we carrying out our good intentions? Are we making gains, however small, in practicing the virtues?

These three things, then, are essential for developing our character and becoming the best person we can be: (1) self-awareness; (2) efforts at improvement; and (3) evaluating our progress.

When students and adults in a school *don't* think about the kind of character they want to possess and don't work on developing it themselves, a character education program will fall far short of its potential. It will feel like an uphill battle, something you're pushing at people. The behavior of individuals and the ethos of the school won't improve as much as they should.

"We've been doing character education now for seven years," said the headmaster of a K-12 independent school. "I think we need to do more to *personalize* it." He sensed that for most of the students, and probably most of the faculty, character education was something "out there." They hadn't made a personal commitment to trying to improve their own character.

It's true that part of our character is "caught"—absorbed from positive role models and the experience of being treated with love and respect. But beyond that, improving our character is a matter of intention, effort, and often struggle. We don't become wiser, more patient, more self-disciplined, more truthful, more courageous, more forgiving, and more humble persons automatically. We do so by deliberately striving to be that kind of person.

Here are 16 strategies for helping all learners, adults as well as young people, undertake this vital task.

1. TEACH WHY CHARACTER MATTERS

Why bother to develop a good character? Why be good?

If we can't answer those questions for students, or engage them in reflection that will help them arrive at solid answers, we're going to have trouble getting them to care about character.

When I talk to young people, here's how I make the case for character:

> Why is character important? Look around. Good character is the key to self-respect, to earning the respect of others, to positive relationships, to a sense of fulfillment, to achievements you can be proud of, to a happy marriage, to success in every area of life. But don't take my word for it. Interview people who have lived most of their lives. Ask them: When they look back, what are they proud of? What gives them fulfillment? What would they do differently if they could live their lives over?

All human beings have a deep desire to be happy. We should invite young persons to consider: "What does it mean to be happy? What leads to happiness—and what does not?"

Unless our children are challenged to think seriously about such questions, many will adopt the media culture's definition of happiness: material comforts and pleasure, especially sexual pleasure. And if that becomes their definition of happiness, they won't see the point of developing character qualities such as self-control, sacrifice, and service.

We should share with students what cross-cultural research tells us about human happiness. The book *Cultivating Heart and Character* by Tony Devine and colleagues reports that cultures around the world affirm three life goals as sources of authentic happiness:

1. maturity of character—becoming the best person we can be
2. loving relationships, such as marriage and family
3. contributing to society—making a positive difference in the lives of others.

When we pursue these life goals—which all require leading a life of virtue—we are living in harmony with our deepest selves. When we neglect or go against these goals—show bad character, act unlovingly in our relationships, take from others without contributing to their good—we make ourselves unhappy.

Especially when they enter adolescence, our children need to find a purpose for their lives. Many teens, lacking a sense of purpose, seek escape in drugs, alcohol, sex, and endless consumption of electronic media. Growing numbers take their lives. They need help in resisting the seductions of a media culture that tells them that life's purpose is maximizing their pleasure. Even those teens who are working toward worthwhile near-term goals (getting into a good college, getting a good job) need a larger vision that will help to sustain them in the face of life's inevitable disappointments and sufferings. Many people achieve their dreams and find

themselves asking, "Is this all there is?"

We can, by holding up the three universally affirmed life goals—maturity of character, loving relationships, and making a difference—offer our children a framework for living that can bring lasting fulfillment. For many of us, this won't be the whole framework—we might add a relationship with God in this life and the next—but the three life goals represent something that all world views can embrace and all schools can teach.

2. TEACH, "NOBODY CAN BUILD YOUR CHARACTER FOR YOU"

The next step in encouraging young people to take charge of their character is to help them understand that they are in fact responsible for the kind of person they become. Here's the message we want to get across:

> Nobody can build your character for you. Parents and teachers can't build your character. They can teach you right from wrong, provide a good example, set and enforce rules, and encourage you to be the best person you can be.
>
> But they can't reach inside you and build your character. *You* have to do that. Character-building is an "inside job." It's a personal responsibility—one that lasts a lifetime. Everybody's character, yours and mine, is a work in progress.

3. TEACH, "WE CREATE OUR CHARACTER BY THE CHOICES WE MAKE"

We create our character by the choices we make. Good choices create good habits and good character. Bad choices create bad habits and bad character.

How can we persuade young people that they're making choices all the time—choices that affect the habits they're forming and the kind of person they are becoming?

High school teacher Hal Urban put it this way to his students: "Life is a series of choices you get to make."

> You get to choose how to treat other people. You can put them down—or build them up.
>
> You get to choose how much you'll learn. You can loaf your way through school—or work hard and make the most of your education.
>
> You get to choose how you'll handle adversity, the inevitable misfortunes of life. You can let adversity crush you—or you can look for a source of strength and deal with whatever life hands you.
>
> You get to choose your belief system and purpose in life. You can wander through life aimlessly—or you can search for the ultimate meaning of life and then live according to it.
>
> Finally, you get to choose your character. You can become less than you're

capable of—or all that you're capable of.

If young people see themselves as making choices, they're more likely to take responsibility for their choices. If you own the choice, you own the responsibility.

Kindergarten is not too young to begin teaching kids that we're each responsible for creating our character. Deb Brown, author of *Growing Character: 99 Successful Strategies for the Elementary Classroom* (www.CharacterEducation.com), taught kindergarten for 21 years. Most of her students came from broken homes, and most qualified for free or reduced lunch. She taught her students "the character message": *Each of us is responsible for creating our character by the daily decisions we make.*

To help them make good decisions, she taught them "wise sayings." She drew these from fables, fairy tales, proverbs, and stories from her own life. She'd capture the moral of each story in a simple saying: *Actions speak louder than words. Honesty is the best policy. If you want to have a friend, be a friend.*

She had her class repeat these sayings at different times of the day—lining up for recess, washing hands for lunch, packing bookbags to go home. Soon they knew them by heart. "These wise sayings," she told them, "can help you stop and think *before* you make a decision. Use them to make good decisions."

During her last year of teaching kindergarten, she had a boy named "Cody." Cody's dad was in prison for murder. He and his friends tried to steal some stereo equipment, didn't set out to hurt anyone, but ended up killing the clerk. Cody talked to Mrs. Brown about how much he looked forward to visiting his father at Christmas. "It's going to be a 'touching visit' this time," he said. "I won't have to talk through the glass—I can sit on his lap."

The day after the Christmas break, Cody came up to Deb Brown and said, "You know, Mrs. Brown, on the way home in the car, I kept thinking about my dad. I just know if he had your class, he wouldn't be where he is now. He would have made better decisions."

Though only 5 ½, Cody had already gotten hold of a very large idea: We shape our character by our decisions, and our character shapes our lives.

4. STUDY PERSONS OF CHARACTER

We can motivate students to think about character—and the sort of character they'd like to possess—by exposing them to persons of character. That can be done by having them read a short biographical sketch, listen to a story, or watch a good video about an historical or contemporary person of widely admired character. As kids get older, a book-length biography or full-length film can serve this purpose well.

One of my favorite character education videos—part of the new *Animated Hero Classics* (www.teachvalues.com)—tells the story of Harriet Tubman. Born into slavery on a Maryland plantation, she not only fled to freedom herself in 1849 but returned at great risk to help more than 300 others escape on the famed Underground Railroad (a network of secret paths that led slaves to freedom in the North).

I recently showed this video at our Center's Summer Institute in Character Education (www.cortland.edu/c4n5rs). I asked teachers to list, as they viewed, the character strengths that enabled Harriet Tubman to do what she did. Among the character qualities they noted were selflessness, courage, confidence, a sense of her own dignity, determination, loyalty, and trust in God. Seeing these character qualities working together in the heroic life of a real person had a much more stirring impact (people broke out into applause at the video's end) than considering such qualities in the abstract.

To encourage students to connect personally with a portrait of character, we can pose questions such as:

- *What is one quality this person had that you'd like to have as part of your own character?*
- *What is one thing you could begin to do to develop that quality?*

There are now many good sources that teachers can turn to for inspiring stories of character: *Portraits of Character* (48 stories for grades 3-8, with thinking questions and writing ideas; www.KaganOnline.com); *The Standing Tall* curriculum (everyday heroes, all grades; www.giraffe.org); *A Study of Heroes* (famous heroes of history, grades 5-12; www.sopriswest.com); *50 American Heroes Every Kid Should Meet* by Dennis Dennenberg (Heroes4US@aol.com); *Uncommon Champions: Fifteen Athletes Who Battled Back* by teacher Mary Kaminsky (grades 4 and up; www.amazon.com); www.TeachWithMovies.com, a website offering lesson plans for using movies as character development teaching tools, including an annotated list of movies *not* recommended; and Onalee McGraw's *Love and Life at the Movies: Educating for Character through the Film Classics* (Onalee@educationalguidance.org).

5. HAVE STUDENTS DO CHARACTER INTERVIEWS

A face-to-face conversation with someone who exemplifies good character—or exemplifies a particular virtue such as hard work, kindness, or courage—can make the concept of character come alive. A sample assignment:

1. Interview a person (for example, a member of your family, someone in school, a member of the community, or a well-known person) whose character you admire.
2. Ask the following questions:

- *How does having a good character help a person in life? How did it help you?*
- *Who had the most influence on your character? How did they influence you?*
- *How did you help yourself develop a good character?*
- *What advice would you give to young people today who want to develop good character?*

1. Write up your interview (all interviews to be posted on the bulletin board) and be prepared to share in a small group three valuable things you learned from doing this assignment.

6. HAVE STUDENTS ASSESS THEIR CHARACTER

To help students (or staff) asses their own character strengths and areas for growth, we can provide a character traits inventory. Barbara Lewis's book, *What Do You Stand For?,* offers one such inventory, based on 29 virtues. The instructions: "For each pair of statements, check the one that describes you. Or check *both* sentences if you believe that you already have a particular trait but would like to develop it further." Sample items:

1. ___ I have positive attitudes.

___ I'd like to have better attitudes.

2. ___ I have clean habits and a clean mind.

___ I'd like to have more positive habits, thoughts, and influences.

3. ___ I have the courage to do and become what I want to be.

___ I'd like to be more courageous.

4. ___ I'm able to forgive others and myself.

___ I want to learn how to forgive more easily.

5. ___ I treat others with respect and courtesy.

___ I need to be more respectful and courteous.

6. ___ I'm responsible and hard-working.

___ I want to develop my sense of responsibility and work ethic.

Alternatively, items like these can be presented as 5-point scales. For example:

I treat others with respect and courtesy.

Does not describe me *Describes me*

1 2 3 4 5

Writing is another good way to engage students in assessing their character strengths and areas for improvement. At Hilltop Elementary School (Lynnwood, Washington), students first write on the general topic, "A Person of Character," then write essays reflecting on their own character:

1. *My strongest virtues are . . .*
2. *I need to work on . . .*
3. *I need to work on these virtues because . . .*

At Eagle Rock School in Boulder, Colorado, students are given a sentence completion pair designed to make them aware of their capacity for positive change by having them reflect on ways they have already changed:

I used to be . . .

But now I am . . .

I used to be . . .

But now I am . . .

7. TEACH DAILY GOAL-SETTING

Once people have assessed their character, we can encourage them to build on their strengths and plan ways they'd like to improve.

Daily goal-setting and self-assessment are an effective way to go about this. We can take a lesson here from the American statesman, Benjamin Franklin. He believed there was an "art of virtue" that could be learned by anyone, including children.

Ben made a list of 13 virtues he wanted to get better at: *Temperance* ("Eat not to dullness; drink not to elevation"); *Silence* ("Speak not but what may benefit others or yourself"); *Order* ("Let all your things have their places"); *Resolution* ("Resolve to perform what you ought"); *Frugality* ("Waste nothing"); *Sincerity* ("Use no hurtful deceit"); *Justice* ("Wrong none"); *Moderation* ("Avoid extremes"); *Cleanliness* ("Tolerate no uncleanness in body, clothes, or habitation"); *Tranquility* ("Be not disturbed at trifles"); *Chastity* ("Rarely use venery [sex] but for health or offspring, never to the injury of your own or another's peace or reputation"); and *Humility* ("Imitate Jesus and Socrates").

In a notebook, he listed one virtue per page. In his autobiography he wrote:

> I determined to give a week's strict attention to each of the virtues successively. And like him, who having a garden to weed does not attempt to eradicate all the bad herbs at once but works on one of the beds at a time, I hoped to see in my pages the progress I made.

Each time he failed to practice the week's virtue, he made a mark on the page. At the end of the week, he tallied his offenses. Franklin said: "I was surprised to find myself so much more full of faults than I had imagined. But I had the satisfaction of seeing them diminish."

In the spirit of its namesake, Benjamin Franklin Classical Charter School (Franklin, Massachusetts), a 1998 *National School of Character*, uses daily goal-setting and self-assessment with its elementary school students. Every Franklin student keeps a *Character Record Book*. At the end of the day, students take out these books and write entries in response to three questions regarding that week's virtue. For example, if the virtue that week is courtesy, the questions are:

1. *How have I shown courtesy today?*

2. *How have I* not *shown courtesy today?*

3. *How will I show courtesy tomorrow?*

8. TEACH KIDS TO MAKE "GOAL STRIPS"

"Goal strips" can help kids learn to set specific goals they want to accomplish within a specific period of time. Michele Borba, in her book *Parents Do Make a Difference*, explains:

> Cut a 3" x 12" colored paper strip for each goal. Fold the strip into three even sections. On the first section, boldly print the words **I will**. In the middle section print ***what*** you will do, and in the final section print ***when*** you will do it. Now set a goal using this *will + what + when* formula. For example: *"I will clean my room in 45 minutes."*
>
> Other examples: "I will get my homework done every night next week." "I will do my chores without being asked for three days in a row." "I will say 'hello' or 'hi' back to everyone who greets me today."

9. HELP KIDS CONNECT THE VIRTUES WITH LIFE

Patricia Cronin is a Chicago-based clinical psychologist who works with inner-city, junior high school girls. "Especially at this age," she says, "we need to help young people see how the virtues relate to real life—how these habits of character will help them in an area that is important to them during this time of their lives." She explains:

> Two issues that are very important to girls of this age are friendship and boyfriend-girlfriend relationships. What virtues or character strengths will help them fulfill their hopes and avoid hurtful problems in these areas? We can help them see that in relationships with boys, the virtues of self-respect, confidence, modesty, a strong conscience, and the courage to resist sexual pressures are qualities that will make for fulfilling relationships and protect their heart, their health, and their future.
>
> Similarly, what virtues are needed to make and keep a friend? Here we discuss empathy, listening, mutual respect, loyalty, patience, forgiveness, and a generous spirit. What problems occur in a friendship when these qualities are missing? We find that the virtues become more real and meaningful to students when we organize them around these developmental needs.

Cronin then encourages each girl to select a particular virtue, set small daily goals for improvement in the practice of that virtue, and work on that virtue for a month At the end of each day, students self-assess and, if they choose, record their progress in a journal.

10. ASSESS "LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY"

At Hilltop Elementary School (Lynwood, Washington), a 1999 *National School of Character*, teachers do "Reflection Time" with their whole class for the last few minutes of the school day and/or at other times through the school day. Kids help each other assess their behavior and hold each other accountable for trying to do better.

From first grade, students at Hilltop have been taught to use a "Levels of Responsibility"

chart to reflect on their behavior. This chart is posted in every classroom, the specials rooms (art, music, and physical education), and the principal's office.

Says a 3rd-grade teacher: "I usually start off by asking, 'How did your day go?' Then I'll say, 'Would anyone like to share what level you were on today?'"

LEVELS OF RESPONSIBILITY

***Level 4*: Respectful**

Responsible

Helps Others

Characteristics: All the characteristics of Level 3, plus doing what is assigned and more, giving help when the opportunity arises, creativity beyond what's expected.

***Level 3*: Respectful**

Responsible

Characteristics: Hard work, doing what is expected, respecting the rights and work of others, cleaning up work carefully, using time well, using materials carefully and responsibly, productive conversation, persistence.

***Level 2*: Works when reminded**

Characteristics: Work accomplished with reminders or questioning done by adult present, not much work seen, conversation unproductive—may be silly, works sometimes and other times not working.

***Level 1*: Not working**

Characteristics: No work, or very little work, seen at end of time, wandering, unfocused.

***Level 0*: Bothering others**

Characteristics: Loud talking, often silly or goofy, work accomplished is minimum or carelessly finished, actions interfere with another's ability to concentrate, abuse of materials.

"Kids are usually very honest," says one Hilltop teacher. "After they self-evaluate, I'll say, 'Okay, so what are you going to do tomorrow to improve?' Sometimes I'll make suggestions, but usually they help each other think of ways they can do better."

11. USE CHARACTER QUOTES TO HELP KIDS SET GOALS

Many teachers like to put up a character quote on the board each day, have students copy it down in a Character Quotes Journal, put the quote in their own words, and respond to a question about it. Suppose the quote were:

Life is 10% what happens to me and 90% how I react to it.

—Charles Swindoll

A reflection question on this quote could be: "What was a time when keeping a positive attitude helped you overcome a difficult situation?"

Action assignments (perhaps for extra credit) related to this quote could be:

- Find and interview a person who shows a positive attitude. Ask, "How do you keep a positive attitude, even when things go wrong?"
- Each day, keep count of the number of times you complain about anything. At the start of each day, set a goal to reduce the number of your complaints.

For 204 character quotes and action assignments organized around weekly virtues, see *Character Quotations* (Lickona and Davidson, 2003, www.KaganOnline.com).

12. DO A GOAL-SETTING BULLETIN BOARD

A San Diego teacher, at the start of every school year, teaches his students the importance of goal-setting. One of his first assignments: "Find newspaper or magazine articles about individuals who set and pursued a goal." Students briefly share their articles with the whole class and then hang them on the bulletin board.

"This activity," the teacher says, "convinces students that goal setting helps people succeed in life." During the following week, he teaches students how to set their own goals—for his class, other subjects, extracurricular activities they may be involved in, and life outside school. By the end of the month, this teacher says, "almost all my students are setting daily goals."

13. HAVE STUDENTS SET 100 GOALS

One of high school teacher Hal Urban's favorite assignments was something called "100 Goals." The directions to his students read like this:

1. Write at least 100 goals, more if you wish.

2. Divide them into categories. You can choose your own categories based on your interests. Here are some you might want to consider:

    * education

* U.S. travel
* career
* foreign travel
* family
* reading
* things you'd like to own
* learning
* fun/adventure
* spiritual growth (things you want to do)
* creating/making/ building
* self-improvement
* service to others
* major accomplishments

3. After you write the 100 goals, select the *10 that are the most important to you.* Write them in any order. Then write a paragraph on your #1 goal. Explain why it is so important to you.

4. You have two choices:

- Treat this as just another stupid school assignment that has to be done; or.
- Treat it as if you're writing a preliminary blueprint for the rest of your life.

1. This will be a significant part of your second quarter grade.

Says Janelle Hernandez, one of Mr. Urban's former students and now a pre-med student at U.C. Santa Barbara:

> I still have my goals posted, and I look at them every day, just like he encouraged us to do. One of my goals was to run the 100-meter hurdles in 18 seconds. I really didn't think I could do it, but every day Mr. Urban encouraged me and asked about my progress. And

I finally did make my goal.

Comments Hal Urban: "I've had students write to me 10 or 15 years after graduation, sending me their list of 100 goals with the ones checked off that they've already achieved. They say, 'If you didn't make us do this assignment, I never would have even dreamed of most of these goals, let alone achieved them.'"

14. HAVE STUDENTS DEVELOP A PORTFOLIO

Schools can help students take responsibility for their personal growth by encouraging them to develop a portfolio that documents their service and achievements. For example, Troup High School in LaGrange, Georgia, offers a Leadership Award to those students who, by the end of high school, have built a portfolio that includes at least 14 of 16 items. Sample items:

1. Documentation of 10 volunteer hours toward a school improvement project
2. Documentation of 20 volunteer hours toward a community improvement project
3. A current resume
4. Special awards or recognitions
5. Attendance at, and summary of, a local or state government meeting
6. Photos of samples of your work
7. A career search on two careers of your choosing
8. Participation in an extracurricular activity for at least a year
9. Three letters of recommendation
10. School administrator's letter attesting to exemplary conduct during high school.

Says principal Bill Parsons: "I promote this constantly. I talk to students about how it will help them present themselves when they apply for college or a job. We have samples of previous portfolios on display in the guidance office to help students believe, 'Hey, I can do this.'"

15. HAVE STUDENTS WRITE A MISSION STATEMENT

In his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens*, Sean Covey (son of Steven Covey) describes a character development activity—"A Personal Mission Statement"—that is now used in some high schools as part of a Character Development course.

"A personal mission statement," Covey explains, "is like a personal credo or motto that states what your life is about." A high school boy wrote this mission statement:

- *Have confidence in yourself and everyone else around you.*
- *Be kind, courteous, and respectful to all people.*

- *Set reachable goals; never lose sight of them.*
- *Never take the simple things in life for granted.*
- *Appreciate other people's differences.*
- *Ask questions.*
- *Remember that before you can change someone else, you must first change yourself.*
- *Speak with your actions.*
- *Make time to help the less fortunate and those who are having a bad day.*

A senior girl testifies to the difference that writing a mission statement made in her life:

> During my junior year, I couldn't concentrate on anything because I had a boyfriend. I wanted to do everything for him to make him happy. Then, naturally, the subject of sex came up. I wasn't at all prepared for it, and it became a nagging, constant thing on my mind. I felt like I wasn't ready and that I didn't want to have sex—but everybody else kept saying, "Just do it."
>
> Then I participated in a character development class at school where they taught me to write a mission statement. I started to write and kept on writing and writing. It gave me a direction and a focus, and I felt like I had a plan and a reason for doing what I was doing. It really helped me stick to my standards and not do something I wasn't ready for.

16. ENABLE STUDENTS TO REFLECT ON LIFE'S LARGEST QUESTIONS

Especially in adolescence, character development cannot be divorced from personal issues and existential questions that are beginning to take center stage for a young person. Here are some questions that teenagers have posed when given the chance to do so anonymously: *Who am I? What is the meaning of life? What is the purpose of* my *life? Am I really doing the things that are going to make me happy, or are they for my mother or the values of our society? Will I ever find true love? How can I let people know what I feel when I hardly trust anyone? Why do people commit suicide? Why is there so much suffering in the world? Do things happen for a reason?*

In her book *The Soul of Education*, Rachael Kessler argues persuasively that schools can—and must—enable young persons to pose questions like these and begin to share their thoughts in an atmosphere that honors their questions and their struggles to answer them. She quotes Thomas More's *Care of the Soul*: "The soul is interested in eternal issues." The soul of adolescents, she says, has seven needs: (1) a yearning for deep connection; (2) a longing for silence and stillness; (3) the search for meaning and purpose; (4) a hunger for joy; (5) a need to create; (6) an urge for transcendence; and (7) a need for initiation into adulthood.

The opportunity to formulate and discuss questions related to these developmental needs helps a teenager make sense out of life, deal with its difficulties, and draw support from peers and caring

adults. In such discussions, Kessler has found, teens often feel secure enough to express faith convictions—something they rarely feel comfortable doing in a public school context.

Not to be able to pose and discuss questions of existential import creates a disconnect between school and life. That often leaves a young person looking for answers in the wrong places, or simply feeling alone. Asks one 10th-grader: "Why this emptiness, in this world and in my heart? How does this emptiness get there, go away, and come back again?" Comments Kessler: "The vacuum of spiritual guidance and fulfillment in adolescents' lives often leads to despair and alienation. Only recently are educators and social scientists beginning to see that this absence of meaning is a critical variable in violent and self-destructive behavior in our youth."

Facilitating discussions like these, of course, takes a skilled and sensitive teacher or counselor who can create a climate of safety and trust. See Kessler's book for examples of how she and other educators have done that.

Most schools find that their character education programs work well at the elementary school level but that older kids, middle school and high school, are a tougher challenge. Secondary students will resist character education if it seems like something adults are doing *to* them. That's one reason why it's important, especially with older students, to help them develop the sense of being authors of their own "life story." There's no better way to do that than by engaging them in becoming the architects of their own character.

We must also remember that if we want to nurture young people's growth in character, we must see *ourselves* as engaged in the same humble process of trying to become a better person. New research on adult development indicates that adults' character qualities are not static. Some adults become wiser, more patient, more giving over time; others become more selfish. The challenge for all of us, at every stage of life, is to keep on the moral journey.