

# Schools should begin with some basic values

By William C. Kashatus

Near the end of his life in the mid-1960s, Albert Schweitzer, the French medical missionary, theologian and noted humanitarian, was asked what advice he would offer to students of that generation. "Do not strive to be a person of success, but rather a person of value," he replied. "The person of success," he explained, "takes more from life than he gives, while the person of value gives more to life than he could ever take from it." Simply put: A person of value acts with character or a strong sense of moral purpose.

Schweitzer's advice spoke to the idealism of that era. He exemplified the person of value for students of the 1960s as they searched for their identities. For many, it was a search that embraced a spirit of compassion for the less fortunate, a respect for human dignity, and a sense of character that committed itself to principle over personal gain. These are also the very same qualities that constitute a truly moral education. But how do we nurture them in our contemporary schools?

The challenge is not easy in a society with a number of competing ethical systems and uncertainty over basic values. Where materialism has become the priority and the measure of one's worth is based on income and prestige rather than character and morality. Where "winning at all costs" has become fashionable and many of our young people, unable to compete by that standard, seek an identity in the wrong environments. In short, our schools have become hostage to a society that sends mixed signals to its young people.

All too often local and state government have made the future of our children dependent on public welfare, rather than personal initiative. Worse, many parents have abandoned their responsibility for the moral welfare of their child.

Even the media promote adolescent rebellion as a virtue or alternatively stress the victimization of youth.

If we are raising an ethically bankrupt generation of young people, we have nobody to blame but ourselves. Our children don't want to be vic-

tims. They want to be loved. They want to be respected. And they want to be disciplined. Yes, *disciplined*.

Often adults feel that disciplining a child is not being loving. In fact, good discipline teaches respect for self and others. It is one of the truest forms of love that any adult can give to a child. Young people realize that fact, though they may not always appreciate it until much later in life. To treat them in any other way would be patronizing and that does not cultivate self-esteem, it only destroys it.

Love, respect and discipline. These are the values we must try to culti-

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vate in our schools if we hope to build character in our children. For educators, this has *always* been a self-evident truth. That is why School Superintendent David W. Hornbeck's recently proposed "Children Achieving" action plan for public school reform in Philadelphia is not that markedly different from what his predecessor Constance Clayton proposed over the course of her 11-year tenure.

Both administrations have stressed the need for rigorous standards that will require students to demonstrate competence in communication, reasoning and problem-solving, citizenship and service.

These are the keys to developing character as well as a constructive, meaningful education for our children. They transcend the consumerism, narcissism and instant gratification of desire that have become enshrined in the adolescent culture of our society. But until we are willing to make the kind of financial and personal commitments necessary to guarantee success, our schools will simply continue to "reinvent the wheel" of educational reform.

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The Philadelphia Inquirer

COMMENTARY

Sunday, May 21, 1995