

PHOTOCOPY
PRESERVATION

Authors add character to curriculum

Schools must set example to teach children values, they say

By Stephaan Harris
USA TODAY

For years, parents have heard child-care experts, clergy and others deliver a similar message: Kids learn to live their lives by the example you set as much as by what you tell them.

Now, educators Theodore and Nancy Sizer argue that the same applies to the way that schools impart lessons in character education. If schools want children to have traits of good character — fairness, consideration and empathy among them — then faculty members have to show those traits in the way they treat others. And too often they miss the mark, the Sizers say in their new book, *The Students Are Watching: Schools and the Moral Contract* (Beacon Press, \$21).

The Sizers assert that the way a school operates teaches values in and of itself and will determine whether students develop a sense of morality.

The couple use anecdotes based on classroom situations they have seen. Nancy taught at public and private secondary schools for 25 years. Ted is the founder of the Coalition of Essential Schools, a school-reform organization. He was the dean of the Harvard Graduate School of Education, a Brown University professor and a school headmaster.

The Sizers pinpoint such common bad practices as "bluffing," in which students and teachers aren't honest with each other. They give a scenario of a teacher with 118 students and a family occupying much of her home life. She plans a discussion for the next day on a book she hasn't had time to review. Meanwhile, one of her students has homework in all classes and attempts to read just enough to get by. The Sizers use this example to illustrate how students and teachers should be direct with each other and not cut corners.

The Sizers argue that often things not related to academics play a role in behavior, which leads to how students and teachers perceive themselves and each other. For example, the authors believe that the tendency of high school teachers to have heavy class loads, often 150 to 180 students, interferes with building character. As students shuffle from class to class, it becomes unlikely teachers will tear themselves away from busy routines to get to know students well. The anonymity and detachment affords students freedom from adult scrutiny.

The Sizers also write that a dilapidated, neglected school building has a huge impact: It can lead students to believe that they aren't worthy of adequate facilities. Meanwhile, fed-up teachers concentrate on transferring to a better-run school instead of focusing on how their students learn.

"We all learn from the institutions in which we work and the places we live. If they're run-down and shabby, we get the message that no one gives a damn," Ted says.

Nancy recalls an incident in the book in which a high school student she taught at a disadvantaged school

With federal aid, schools seek safety with classes on integrity

The Students Are Watching comes at a time when school districts nationwide have adopted character education lessons and programs, sometimes with government funding, to try to instill citizenship skills. The sessions teach the merits of such traits as integrity, responsibility, respect, consideration and tolerance.

Educators are banking on the trend to help campuses curb discipline problems and create a safer, friendlier environment.

For younger children, most of the lessons are pulled from videos and books. Older students can learn through discussions that evolve from literature.

Since 1995, 28 states have received grants totaling \$20 million from the Department of Education for character education programs, according to the Character Education Partnership, a Washington, D.C.-based group that coordinates the programs. It estimates that at least 38 states have some kind of character initiatives in their schools.

Last fall, school districts in Oregon began character education activities with federal dollars. State Education Department spokeswoman Mary Jean Katz says officials are observing programs in two districts to learn how much these programs affect student behavior and academic gains.

Schools in the West Linn-Wilsonville district, outside Portland, participated in the Caught in Character program, assistant superintendent Jane Stickney says.

Students watch videos in which children and adults tell stories about episodes in their lives that have taught them integrity and responsibility. After viewing, the students devise their own stories.

"We believe academics and character education are linked," Stickney says. "Students perform better academically when they perceive school as an orderly and respectful place."

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asked her, "What are you doing in a dump like this?"

"A kid has to feel like he can relate to the purposes of the school and the people there. In too many schools, he doesn't feel that," Nancy says. "The purpose for school is to help bring kids into the culture as a well-functioning adult."

The Sizers use discussions as a springboard for teaching values in their 300-student charter high school, located on a former Army base in Devens, Mass., and serving rural and suburban students. Ted says the school forsakes most electives, with the exception of foreign language, to give more attention and class time to core subjects. Classes also are kept small, so teachers spend more time on each student. He says that during one history lesson, the students discussed ethnic cleansing after watching *Schindler's List*.

He uses that example to explain how many high school teachers give homework without using class time to encourage analysis of issues. He says students miss the opportunity to learn principles in the process.

The book arrives as character edu-

cation lessons are gaining steam across the USA. Ted cautions, though, that schools cannot depend on temporary programs to instill long-lasting values. He says officials should see whether their actions con-

tradict behavior expected from students.

"Schools have to make changes, because kids will see through a program," he says. "Teen-agers have sharp antennae for hypocrisy."

Vouching for the public schools

By Tamara Henry
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Any way you look at it, most Americans support public schools and aren't quite ready to turn the nation's educational system over to private schools or some other alternative.

The annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools, out Tuesday, used 16 of this year's 38 questions to focus on all aspects of the issue of whether government funds should be used to subsidize all or part of private school education for low-income students.

Among the findings from the survey of 1,103 adults, with a margin of error of 4 percentage points:

► 70% said the nation should stick with improving the existing public schools; 28% preferred a voucher system for tuition at private schools.

► If given a chance to send kids to private school with government funds, 51% said they'd leave their

oldest child in his current school; 46% would pick a different school.

Jack Jennings of the Center on Education Policy says the poll underscores the importance of "vouchers in the school-reform debates now occurring in state capitals and Washington, D.C., as well as around kitchen tables in homes across America."

Still, the issue of public support for vouchers is confusing, with responses dependent on how questions are phrased, Phi Delta Kappa's Lowell Rose says. For example, when the public is asked about allowing a choice of schools at "public expense," 41% support and 55% oppose it. That represents an increase in opposition since last year. If the question is choosing public, private or church-related schools with the "government paying" all or part of tuition, 51% support and 47% oppose it, a slight increase in opposition from last year.

"Public expense" and "government paying" mean the same thing, but the public attaches different definitions to the two, Rose says.

Teaching methods blamed for U.S. students' shortfall

By Tamara Henry
USA TODAY

The achievement gap between U.S. students and those in Japan and Germany can be traced to differences in how they are taught in the classroom, says an international study set for publication Sept. 7.

Researchers James W. Stigler and James Hiebert, authors of the soon-to-be-published *The Teaching Gap* (The Free Press, \$23), say a study of the three countries found that:

► Teaching practices common in the USA inhibit schools. For instance, the study says U.S. math teaching is presented in a piecemeal and prescriptive way, as students are taught procedural skills. Japan, on the other hand, teaches for conceptual understanding.

► U.S. schools provide little time or incentive for teachers to work together to improve lessons.

► Japanese and German systems encourage groups of teachers to spend time planning lessons and focusing on professional development.

Stigler and Hiebert draw their conclusions from an analysis of videotapes from 231 classrooms show-

ing eighth-grade teachers at work in the three countries. These were part of the Third International Mathematics and Science Study, which investigated math and science achievement among fourth-, eighth- and 12th-graders in 41 nations. In eighth-grade math, 20 of the countries scored significantly higher, on average, than the USA, including Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Canada, France and Australia.

"This book is about teaching and how to improve it. It is not another attempt to bash teachers or blame them for the ills that beset America's schools," write Stigler, a psychology professor at the University of California at Los Angeles, and Hiebert, from the University of Delaware.

But Penny Early of the American Association of Colleges of Teacher Education says a number of people, particularly from Japan, come to the USA to talk with "our educators about the best practices in preparing teachers."

"It may well be that there are things that can be learned from other countries, but I don't think it's entirely a one-way street," she says of the study.

Fla. high court challenges state's use of electric chair

By Jackie Hallifax
The Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. — Florida's Supreme Court challenged the state Tuesday to defend the constitutionality of the electric chair after being shown gruesome photos of the latest electrocution.

Justice Harry Lee Anstead called the images "heinous," "horrible" and "right out of some horror movie."

"Can you hold that picture up to the people of the state of Florida and say this is what we want to do when we are taking a person's life through due process?" Anstead asked Richard Martell, chief of capital appeals for Attorney General Bob Butterworth.

Martell agreed the photographs were graphic but disagreed they were reason to retire the electric chair.

"Any execution is going to involve certain things no matter how it's carried out," he said. "It's going to involve fear, it's going to involve ... discomfort."

Just because an execution is unpleasant doesn't make it unconstitutional, Martell said.

Justices had been shown color photos of Allen Lee "Tiny" Davis, still strapped in the chair minutes after his bloody execution.

In one, the lower half of Davis' face is covered by a leather strap that holds his head to the back of the chair. The upper half of his face is purplish, and the features are scrunched together.

A line of blood stretches down the mask from his left nostril.

Davis was executed July 8 for the murders in 1982 of a pregnant Jacksonville woman and her two young daughters.

His nose started bleeding just before the current was sent through his body.

Florida's high court ordered a halt to further execution until Sept. 14 and ordered a judge in Orlando to hold a hearing on operation of the chair.

Circuit Judge Clarence Johnson ruled three weeks ago that electrocution does not violate the constitutional ban on cruel or unusual punishment.

Martell wants the high court to uphold that ruling.



Davis: His execution was bloody