

## The Expertise of Moral Character

By Darcia Narvaez, Ph.D.



Darcia Narvaez

For the past several years, my colleagues and I, in partnership with the Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning, have been developing a model for character education in the middle grades that we call

“Community Voices and Character Education.” Our work has been guided by four considerations. First, we adopt a skills-based understanding of moral character. This is not a new idea. Plato, for example, in *The Republic*, repeatedly draws an analogy between the training and practices of the just person and the training and practices of skilled artisans and professionals. A just person is one who has particular, highly-cultivated skills that have been developed through training and practice.

Second, like Plato, we believe that character development is a matter of nurturing skills towards high levels of expertise. Our work is guided by recent advances in cognitive science regarding the nature of expertise and its development.

Third, the pedagogy driving our model holds several educational advantages. Here I mention just three: (1) Our model assumes an active cognitive approach to learning, which is central to best practice instruction; (2) Our model opens character education to greater accountability in that skills are teachable, and their progress can be measured; (3) Our model insists that character development be embedded within standards-driven academic curriculum, for this is the only way character education can be sustained.

Finally, we contend that a curricular approach to character education must be in collaboration with “community voices.” The implementation must reflect the commitments of the local community and the needs of its citizenry. The issue of “whose values will be taught?” is best approached by embedding educational goals within the value expressions of particular communities.

All four of these orienting assumptions have guided our work in Minnesota. I would like to flesh out some of these ideas by briefly addressing five questions: (1) How do children learn? (2) How are experts different from novices, and how did they get that way?; (3) What do people of good character know?; (4) How do we nurture good character in schools?; (5) How can a program be sustained?

### 1. How Do Children Learn?

One approach to instruction essentially assumes that the child is passive in his/her own learning. The child’s job is to attend, receive, store, and recall. In this approach, the teacher “pitches” information, and the student must “catch” it. Learning is a matter of catching what the teacher pitches. This conception of learning is inaccurate. Children learn from their interactions with people and objects (Reed & Johnson, 1998; Piaget, 1970); they formulate a set of individualized representations of the world (Piaget, 1952); they construct networks of conceptual associations or schemas (Rumelhart, 1980; Taylor & Crocker, 1981). With experience, schemas increase in complexity (Schank & Abelson, 1977), and if a person becomes very good at performing and solving problems in a particular area, we call that person an expert.

### 2. How Are Experts Different From Novices?

Experts are different from novices in three significant ways. First, there are differences in the size, complexity, and organization of knowledge schemas (Chi, Glaser & Farr, 1988; Sternberg, 1998). Those with more complex schemas in moral judgment are able to say more about a moral dilemma and recall more from a moral story (Narvaez, 1997; Narvaez, 1998).

Second, experts see the world differently (Neisser, 1967). Their deep and vast pattern matching capabilities allow experts

to notice things that novices miss. For example, among auditors, those with more complex moral judgment schemas are more likely to find questionable entries in financial statements, and they are more likely to report them (Poneman & Gabhart, 1994).

Experts also possess well-developed sets of procedural skills. Unlike novices, experts know *what* knowledge to access, *which* procedures to apply, *how* to apply them, and *when* it is appropriate (Abernathy & Hamm, 1995). More generally, experts approach problems conceptually. They look for the underlying grammar or structure in a problem, while novices get bogged down or distracted by surface appearances (Novick, 1988). For

example, expert classroom teachers can recognize the pre-conditions for misbehavior and have a set of tools they can employ to circumvent it. In contrast, the novice teacher often misses the cues until the classroom is well out of hand (Berliner, 1992).

Expertise is a notion that has gained prominence among educational researchers. Indeed, some contend that intellectual abilities are best viewed as forms of expertise (Sternberg, 1998; 1999). Children move along a continuum from novice to expert in each content domain that they study. We adopt this perspective for moral character.

How do experts become experts? To develop expertise, one must master the defining features and underlying structures of the domain and focus on them during extensive practice. These conceptual tools and general principles enable them to detect meaningful patterns and solve problems (Abernathy & Hamm, 1995). Further, their practice is focused, extensive and coached (Ericsson & Charness, 1994; Ericsson, Krampe, & Tesch-Roemer, 1993).

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# It's a Matter of Character!

## President Bush Keeps Important Campaign Promise

*A Word from our Executive Director—Gary Beckner*



Gary Beckner

**I**t was my privilege to represent the AAE at a conference at the White House on June 19<sup>th</sup>, hosted by First Lady Laura Bush. The title of the conference was “Character and Community” and featured speeches by Mrs.

Bush, Secretary Colin Powell, Secretary Rod Paige, and researchers from Stanford, Duke, and Notre Dame. The speech by Darcia Narvaez, Ph.D., University of Notre Dame, was, in my opinion, so on point that I have asked that it be included in its entirety in this edition of *Education Matters* (see page 1).

Sitting next to me at the meeting was one of my heroes, Dr. Kevin Ryan. As many of you know, Dr. Ryan is one of the AAE’s founding board members. As such, he has been invaluable to our organization and has also become a good friend and a personal inspiration to me.

Those of you who have been members for awhile will recall some of the excellent articles Kevin has written that have convincingly made the case for restoring formal character education in our public schools. That’s why this particular event at the White House meant so much to both of us.

It’s been a long time coming, but there finally seems to be a recognition and consensus that the “values neutral” or “values clarification” movement that was foisted on

our nation’s public school system forty years ago has failed. It has done such a disservice to our children and our nation that it will take decades to undo the damage.

This conference underscored the President’s campaign pledge to try to guide our public schools back toward the goal of seeking a balance of academic achievement *and* character formation. In fact, President Bush, an unscheduled speaker at the event, seized the opportunity to unveil his plan to encourage our nation’s school leaders to rededicate themselves toward re-institutionalizing formal character education. He has tripled the U.S. Department of Education’s budget designated for character education grants, and the effort will be spearheaded by the First Lady, Colin Powell, and Secretary Paige. If the movement needed people of character to lead it, we could not ask for better role models.

As you charter AAE members can imagine, this was a good day for Kevin Ryan and me. The folks sitting directly behind the two of us at the meeting must have been amused (or at least distracted) by the site of these two grown men constantly elbowing each other in glee and nodding affirmatively at nearly every point being made.

However, this will continue to be an uphill battle. There are still many educators

out there who have been indoctrinated into believing public schools should not attempt to teach character or values. Kevin would be the first to remind them that we are perversely teaching our children what we value by *not* teaching values. And since our schools cannot avoid teaching values inadvertently, we might just as well do it formally. Character is not something all children will just catch floating through the so-called “invisible character curriculum.” Teaching character formally requires us to work with local community leaders and parents in developing a list of virtues that can be agreed upon to help form strong character in our young people. Or, a district could adapt a program already designed to build character—such as *Core Virtues*. (Visit our website and click on *Resources* for more on *Core Virtues*.) The point is to approach the effort with a plan, rather than the haphazard way it is sometimes attempted.

At least now, there is a consensus that we must do *something* to help lift our children out of the moral morass in which they’re trapped. The AAE promised to continue to do all we can to lend a hand. **EM**

*For portions of the speeches supporting this event, go to [www.ed.gov/initiatives/character/](http://www.ed.gov/initiatives/character/) and click on the “White House Conference on Character and Community,” hosted by Laura Bush.*

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## Employee Testimony Highlights Problems Created by Compulsory Unionism

**T**wo Ohio teachers at the center of a national religious discrimination case involving the National Education Association (NEA) testified before the Workforce Protections Subcommittee in the House Education and Workforce Committee regarding the need to end forced unionism. “The teachers’ testimony exposed the harassment that many employees face every day when laboring under compulsory unionism,” said Mark Mix, Executive Vice President of the National Right to Work Committee. “The only way to help workers suffering under compulsory unionism is to make union membership 100 percent voluntary.”

The Congressional Subcommittee’s hearings come on the heels of a nationally publicized determination by the Equal Employment

Opportunity Commission (EEOC) that the NEA is systematically discriminating against religious objectors by stonewalling objections. The NEA forces objectors to undergo examination on an annual basis before honoring their right to divert dues away from the union on the basis of their religious beliefs.

Dennis Robey, an Ohio teacher, brought charges against the NEA and its local affiliates after they refused to honor his religious objection to supporting the union because it promotes pro-abortion, pro-homosexuality positions.

Kathleen Klamut, a practicing Christian, objects to having her money used to support the union’s pro-abortion positions. Last fall, when she began working as a psychologist in the Ravenna City Schools, Klamut asked to

have her dues redirected to a charity—her right under the law. When the NEA’s local affiliate refused to accommodate her, Klamut contacted the National Right to Work Foundation and filed charges with the EEOC against the teacher union.

Congress has a bill before it—the National Right to Work Act (H.R. 1109)—that would eliminate the federal authorization for forced union dues, affecting 7.8 million workers across the country. The National Right to Work Act enjoys support from nearly 80 percent of the American public and majority of the members of the full House Education and Workforce Committee, chaired by Congressman John Boehner. As of the writing of this article, Chairman Boehner has yet to schedule a hearing or a vote on the bill. **EM**

# Looking into the (Ed School) Abyss

By Bradford P. Wilson



Bradford P. Wilson

I recently had occasion to meet with two leading administrators of one of the country's largest school districts. This particular school district, because of the poor performance of its students, is facing an unprecedented overhaul of its governance and operations.

The subject of our conversation was the academic preparation of high school teachers of American history. I spoke of the important role that rival interpretations of our national Constitution have played in the great political crises in American history, suggesting the need for history teachers to have a solid knowledge of constitutional principles. The response I received haunts me: "Our school district is committed to a constructivist approach to teaching and learning. We are committed to offering a hands-on learning experience in all of our classrooms. How would you take something like constitutional theory and make it fit our commitments?" I paused for a moment, thinking about the frightful educational consequences of allowing pedagogical theory to determine the selection of academic content. Before I could find my voice, a young administrative assistant jumped in with an enthusiastic solution: "You could divide the students up," she said, "into black males, black females, Hispanic males, Hispanic females, gays and straights, and so on, and they could all imagine what life would be like for their group under different constitutional theories." The administrators loved the idea.

It got worse. One of my hosts, the district's social studies coordinator, proudly described a federally funded three-year program underway that teamed up the district's teachers with a local university to improve their knowledge of American history. The current year is devoted to the study of the American Revolution, organized, he said, around the theme of whom the Revolution excluded and left behind. The second year's theme will be "Race, Class, and Gender in American History." And the third year will address "Industrialization," whose focus, one can only expect, will be the exploitation of the American working class. My experience is just another reflection of the triumph of the multiculturalist and "progressive" orthodoxies among professional educators. The obstacles these ideologies pose to meaningful improvement in K-12 instruction are only slowly becoming understood and challenged. What the ideologues fear most is public exposure. So allow me to expose.

A couple of years ago, the people of Colorado decided to improve the academic performance of their children. New statewide standards for academic content and teacher performance were enacted to achieve this result. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE) was charged with reviewing the state's university-based teacher education programs, in light of the new expectations. To assist them in that review, the CCHE invited the National Association of Scholars to examine the programs at four institutions—Mesa College, UC Boulder, the University of Northern Colorado, and Metropolitan State. We hired Penn State education professor, David Warren Saxe, a national authority on state learning standards.

When Saxe's report was made public, ed school administrators and even a state legislator or two waxed indignant. Attempting to deflect attention away from the central issue—Was the report accurate, and if so, did it matter?—they went to the media to attack the messengers. The NAS, they said, was conservative, and therefore, could not be trusted. (Our response was simple and truthful: the NAS is an association of thousands of professors from across the political spectrum, whose only bias is in favor of high academic standards.) Professor Saxe, some administrators suggested, based his report on nothing more than a brief and inadequate on-site visit. (False again, we said: Those same administrators had provided Saxe with a mountain of documents fully describing their programs. Saxe spent months studying those documents, with site visits coming only at the end of a long process of review.)

What was in Saxe's report from which ed school spokesmen wished to divert the public's attention? Saxe found that the programs at CU-Boulder and Metro were saturated with political dogmas and pedagogical theories that were incompatible with the educational reforms mandated by Colorado law.

The Colorado reforms were aimed at helping the state's young citizens to become sufficiently literate, numerate, and agile of mind to be able to take their place as informed, responsible individuals in a free and self-governing society. Obviously, a commitment to course content and instructional methods that impart relevant skills and knowledge is the heart of such an enterprise. In the schools of education at CU-Boulder and Metro, however, Saxe found only a commitment to a radical social and political agenda, nowhere called for by Colorado law or policy.

To those who embrace that agenda, the delicate fabric of Western civilization is something to be scorned rather than understood and perpetuated. The pageant of American history is taught as a sorry record of injustice and oppression of vulnerable minorities. The astonishing diversity of human thought and experience in Western, including American, life, past and present, is reduced to a set of crude variations on the theme of racial, ethnic, class, gender, and homophobic bigotry.

The introductory course at CU-Boulder, "Becoming a Teacher," was required of all future elementary and secondary school teachers. In the course syllabus provided by CU's administrators, Saxe found no reference to Colorado education laws and learning standards. But it did promise a "learning experience" built on an examination of

"contemporary issues like race, class, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and power." A week was devoted to "Understanding White Privilege", another week to "Race and Ethnicity in Education", another week to "Sex, Gender & Teaching Values", and another week to "Heterosexism & Homophobia: Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Students." Recommended readings included such timeless classics as

*Sexual Democracy: Women, Oppression, and Revolution*; *Two Nations: Black and White, Separate, Hostile, Unequal*; and *Fear of a Queer Planet: Queer Politics and Social Theory*. This course set the tone of ideological indoctrination, in all its rigidity and intolerance, that guided the content of the rest of the program.

Is it not evident that American schools have an important responsibility to impart a knowledge and appreciation of our civilization's moral and political foundations and our country's unique contributions to the progress of human rights and constitutional democracy? Equipped with such an education, we can intelligently debate our culture's failings and imperfections. The kind of "civic education" that is championed by too many teacher educators, however, subordinates our common humanity and our shared citizenship to racial, economic, and sexual "identities", and subsumes them under two simple human types: victims and victimizers. Far from an education in citizenship and civility, this shallow approach is a recipe for bitterness, hostility, and a nagging sense of grievance against the past and the present. It poisons the wells of democratic citizenship.

Continued on page 6,  
See... "Looking into the (Ed School) Abyss"

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# Opinion Survey Results on NBPTS

Last month, we conducted an e-mail survey of our membership regarding the National Board of Professional Teacher Standards (NBPTS) certification process. Since there is little evidence, to date, demonstrating the efficacy of the process, we asked our members for their personal experiences and/or opinions. We referred our members to two investigative reports on National Board Certification and asked them to review the reports before submitting responses. Those reports can be found on the Web at <http://www.education-consumers.com/briefs/may2002.asp> and <http://www.edweek.com/ew/newstory.cfm?slug=36board.h21>.

The results are in and it appears our members share the same concerns of many scholars across the nation—namely, that NBPTS certification is not now, nor will it ever be, the panacea that so many states are counting on and investing in. As it turns out, many of our members have earned a NBPTS certificate. Yet, a surprising number of those members did not feel the process necessarily made them a more effective teacher. In fact, after reviewing hundreds of survey comments, all that can be said for sure is that National Board Certification is a process that proves a good teacher is, indeed, a good teacher. However, the question remains: Will the process elevate the entire profession and, through cause and effect, raise the bar on professional standards and, thereby, the academic achievement of our children?

We want to make it clear, however, that this survey does not represent an official position of the AAE on this subject. We believe the concept of a portable and reliable certification is a good one. A number of our state affiliates are providing assistance in helping their members prepare for NBPTS certification. And they certainly should, since, in some states, that is about the only way teachers can earn bonuses or merit differential pay. Our reservations are not about the concept but with the NBPTS itself.

The leadership of the NBPTS has revealed through a number of public statements that it appears to be more concerned about advancing a social agenda than it is about teaching excellence. We would love to see the process kept honest and straightforward through competition. In that regard, we were pleased to see that the U.S. Department of Education has awarded a 5 million dollar grant to the National Council for Teacher Quality to establish the American Board for Certification of Teacher Excellence (ABCTE). Visit [www.nctq.org](http://www.nctq.org) for more on this story. At least in the near future, teachers will have a choice of certificates for which they could apply. Already, ten states have indicated that they will cooperate with the newly formed certifier.

Below are the survey results and some representative comments:

**Are NBPTS-certified teachers more effective than non-certified teachers?**

**74 percent of our respondents say no.**

**11 percent of our respondents say yes.**

**15 percent of our respondents say not sure or say there is no way to tell.**

## Comments from the pro side—

*"I am a big proponent of NBPTS and National Certification. This is one form of MERIT pay that is accepted by many in public education. National Board Certification is not about comparing students against one another, as much as it is about meeting individual student needs and documenting the results. It is a personal reflection of one's own skills as a teacher.*

*"I disagree with the overall thesis of the forwarded article because the teacher sample was insignificant. Instead, I urge you to read an article published recently in the Harvard Education Review (April, 2002 or May, 2002), which stated a correlation between nationally certified teachers and Best Teaching Practices."*

—4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher from Arlington, Virginia

*"I recently received my National Board Certification and served as a mentor to candidates for the 2002 year. My first reaction to this study is, 'What is the author's purpose for doing it? Who said that the certified teachers were better, in the first place? If a veteran teacher decides to go for this meritorious recognition and completes a job well done, why shouldn't they be recognized? It's not to say that all of the other teachers are not as worthwhile. It's just a recognition of a completed challenge. I'm sure there are plenty of great teachers out there who have equal, if not better, abilities than some of the candidates and, for whatever reason, have not pursued their National Board."*

—4<sup>th</sup> Grade Gifted and Talented teacher from Miami, Florida

*"I am strongly considering earning my NBPTS because I believe it will make me more marketable if I move to a new area and because I would receive \$20,000 in bonuses from the state of California and my school (unless budget cuts change that)."*

—High School Science Teacher from Apple Valley, California

*"I am presently in the process of seeking to become National Board certified. I decided to do this because if I become certified, it will mean a 12-percent increase in pay. I am eight years away from retirement, and this can have a tremendous effect on my retirement benefits. This has been a very long and laborious*

*process, and I do feel it has stretched me as a teacher. I cannot say that it has had a dramatic impact on my teaching because my approach to teaching has changed dramatically in the past few years. I do think it has made me a more reflective practitioner."*

—2<sup>nd</sup> Grade Teacher from Mooresville, North Carolina

*"I just completed my National Board this past April, and I am awaiting my results, which will come out in December of this year. I feel that the National Board is a process that proves one to be the kind of teacher he or she believes him or herself to be. It is a process that shows how a teacher can touch individual lives and cause them to grow—not only intellectually, but also emotionally, psychologically, etc. In this process, the individual teacher analyzes what he or she does on a daily basis and reflects back on the productive and unproductive nature of his/her teaching. The National Board causes teachers to learn about themselves and how they teach, as well as how they should seek growth and improvement. Teachers who seek out the National Board love their job and want to do their best and prove that they do know what is in the best interest of our children."*

—High School English Teacher, Fairfield, Ohio

## Some comments from the con side—

*"I signed up to be part of a pilot program this spring for the NBPTS. After reading through the papers, I decided not to do it. I then found out that of the seven or eight other teachers from our school who had signed up, only two actually kept the material and finished.*

*"I questioned the very essence of the program. How does this make me a better teacher, anyway? The basis of their teaching is student-centered, which our principal basically forbids in our school. She believes direct teaching is the best way to go, using hands-on materials as much as possible for concrete experiences. I tend to agree. I have not had good experiences with grouping the students and having them learn from each other, which seems to be encouraged for certification. When I told other teachers this, they said, 'Why not group the students for the videos and the lesson you are turning in, and then go back to teaching as before?' (Wouldn't that be cheating?) Board-certified teachers maintain that the very best aspect of the certification process is the reflection required at the end of each day's teaching. I know several teachers who have been certified, and when I have asked how it makes them better, they always say it is the reflection part, not anything they have learned."*

—4<sup>th</sup> Grade Teacher from Melbourne, Florida

"The make-up of the governing board of NBPTS, which will control the screening process of applicants, should concern all independent teachers, due to possible bias/preferential treatment for 'union' members. Since there is a major monetary reward for attaining NBPTS certification (Louisiana: \$50,000=\$5,000/year for 10 years), the 'glowing' reports from those successful participants should be taken with a grain of salt! As an 'older teacher' with 25+ years of experience, I would not be inclined to participate—it would be more beneficial financially and time-wise for a young teacher. If the education colleges were doing a better job, NBPTS would not be necessary."

—Elementary School Teacher from Rapides Parish, Louisiana

"The problem I have observed with certification programs is the same as pay being based on degrees obtained. Research shows that the skills required to be successful in the learning environment do not equate to skills in real world performance. We know better educated people should have a better knowledge base, but that does not mean they can deliver that knowledge to others. I have observed home-schooled successes with parents without degrees and Ph.D.s who had no business in the classroom."

"Maybe the approach to selecting and rewarding good teachers should be outcome-based (not based on one class but overall). Pre-testing and evaluating on ability to deliver knowledge would serve the education community more than just degrees or certifications."

—College Administrator and Counselor from Huntsville, Alabama

"If something has happened to 'dummy down' the system in which future teachers are tested for qualification, why not fix that instead of requiring yet another useless certification? We have lots of people out there who do very well on tests and are the worst teachers in the world! We also have fantastic teachers who can't pass these standardized tests for various reasons."

—Middle School Teacher from London, Kentucky

"Standards are good and necessary. Recertification is good and necessary, but to say that quality education comes from this process is like saying that only good people come from those who attend church every Sunday. Quality educators evolve from several things. Some folks can flat out teach with no formal training, testing, or anything. So, any kind of testing for certification that claims to be the end-all for success in education is not only a farce, it is a waste of paper and ink."

—High School Guidance Counselor from Midlothian, Virginia

"A 'certificate' is not what makes a quality/effective teacher, just as a Ph.D. does not necessarily make a good/effective doctor, lawyer, or teacher. I have observed first-year teachers who are innovative and awesome. I have also seen highly educated and experienced teachers who need a new career. An effective teacher is one who knows his/her students and makes every effort to provide a well-rounded, exciting, motivating, and quality education for each child in the classroom."

—Elementary School Special Ed Teacher from Mayer, Arizona

"It is my opinion that the criteria for NBPTS Certification is unfair and misguided. The assessment of the NBPTS portfolios is done by one person who may not have expertise in the subject area. A number of my colleagues have applied for NBPTS, and the best teacher I have ever had the privilege to work with was not only rejected by the reviewer, but the review was a scathing insult! Another teacher, one of the worst teachers I have worked with, whose grading methods I consider completely invalid (the students exchange papers to grade and then report their own grade to the teacher, who never sees the actual paper), was accepted for National Certification. In short, the criteria is completely arbitrary, and the teachers' submissions can be invented and videos staged."

—Learning Specialist from Brevard County, Florida

"There are many excellent teachers out there so focused on their students that they don't have the discretionary time needed to complete National Board Certification. It may be a wonderful idea, but I don't think any of the great educators I work with would be any better by having earned a piece of paper to prove their worthiness."

—Elementary School Teacher from South Bend, Indiana

"I looked into such a certification about five years ago when the certification first began to get some real national attention. The only thing that was missing from all of the requirements was an analysis of whether or not my students were actually learning the material for which I had been hired to teach. It was clear to me that NBPTS was another example of education's new field of dreams; if you teach it this way, they will learn. The certification only rubber stamps what someone has predetermined to be the qualities of effective teachers, while disre-

garding the end product."

—High School Physical Science & Chemistry Teacher from Brunswick, Maine

### Some pro and con comments—

"Are NBPTS-certified teachers better than other teachers? No, there are other teachers in our district who are as good. But all certified teachers are among the best and most involved teachers in our district. Which came first? They were excellent teachers first."

—School Librarian from Leighton, Iowa

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"Are NBPTS-certified teachers better than other teachers? No, there are other teachers in our district who are as good. But all certified teachers are among the best and most involved teachers in our district."

"I am a National Board-certified teacher and have been now since 1998. I remember that the main reason that I sought the certification was the bonus that was offered by North Carolina if I earned it. I have very little doubt that the process of self-analysis I went through while preparing my portfolio helped me to become a better teacher of mathematics."

"All of this, however, is not indicative of unqualified support of National Board Certification."

NBPTS is constantly sending me newsletters, notices of meetings, etc., whose main focus seems to be on advertising the value of National Board Certification, rather than on improving education practice, organization, or effectiveness. When we have to spend so much effort telling how important we are, I find myself wondering how much value is really there."

—High School Math Teacher from Ontario, Ohio

"This year, I have worked with four National Board-certified teachers. Of these four teachers, I feel that two are wonderful teachers and very deserving of any prestige and pay raise involved. However, the other two obviously created impressive portfolios and somehow concealed their inability to control their classroom. Parents, as well as colleagues, are dissatisfied with the students' performance in one of these teachers' classrooms. Also, these co-workers have also discussed the manner in which some others obtained National Board certification, which included misrepresenting their community involvement, etc."

"Inarguably, teachers are underpaid and should be allowed pay raises based on performance. However, I am not sure that this assessment of performance is an accurate one. Student achievement should most definitely be taken into account with these assessments."

—Elementary School Teacher from Blount County, Alabama

# “The Expertise of Moral Character”

(Continued from page 1)

## 3. What Do People of Good Character Know?

In Minnesota, we spent several years in consultation and collaboration with educators to construct a framework for character development that draws on reviews of research (Bebeau, Rest, & Narvaez, 1999; Rest, 1983; Narvaez & Rest, 1995) and builds on the foundations I have just outlined (Narvaez, Mitchell, Endicott & Bock, 1999). Persons of good character have better developed skills in four areas: Ethical Sensitivity, Ethical Judgment, Ethical Motivation, and Ethical Action. Each of these four processes has seven skills, along with suggestions for sub-skills (Narvaez, Endicott & Bock, in press). The skills and subskills are the schemas that students need to build for good character and for good citizenship. For example, experts in the skills of Ethical Sensitivity are better at quickly and accurately ‘reading’ a moral situation and determining what role they might play. Experts in the skills of Ethical Judgment have many tools for solving complex moral problems. Experts in the skills of Ethical Motivation cultivate an ethical identity that leads them to prioritize ethical goals. Experts in the skills of Ethical Action know how to keep their “eye on the prize,” enabling them to stay on task and take the necessary steps to get the ethical job done. Our model is appropriate for understanding character development because it provides a wholistic, concrete view of the moral person. Yet, identifying the skills or the curriculum is not enough for a successful character development program.

## 4. How Do We Nurture Good Character in Schools?

**What not to do.** Like many experts, some teachers forget what it is like to be a novice (Hinds, 1999; Whitehead, 1929). Some educators believe that presenting a list of virtues is nearly as clear to the students as it is to them. Although the label “honesty” is convenient for the adult in chunking all sorts of experiences in memory, a child has few experiences on which to draw. Labeling a complex set of behaviors with a single word or story does not help the novice or the child. A story’s moral theme that seems so clear to an adult is not the theme many children take away (Narvaez, 2002; Narvaez, Bentley, Gleason, & Samuels, 1998; Narvaez, Gleason, Mitchell, & Bentley, 1999). For example, in one study, third graders, on average, extracted the intended theme only 10

percent of the time (Narvaez, Gleason et al, 1999). Research shows that knowledge application is necessary to build expertise.

**What educators should do.** Here are three recommendations.

1. *Educators must take on the responsibility of intentional character skill instruction* instead of a hit-or-miss approach.
2. *Educators must provide authentic learning experiences based on levels of apprenticeship.* Four levels of learning or apprenticeship are suggested (Narvaez et al, in press): (1) Pattern detection by immersion in relevant examples; (2) Attention to critical detail; (3) Practice procedures; (4) Integrate knowledge and procedures. Educators must present the defining features of each skill—of showing respect, of showing care, of persevering. Teachers need to make sure students have many opportunities to build their own understandings or schemas from practice while teachers guide them through the terrain of the domain. As apprentices of good character, students need to be immersed in authentic learning environments, taking on increasing responsibility and refining their sensibilities and strategies as they gain more experience (Marshall, 2000; Rogoff, Baker-Sennett, Lacasa, & Goldsmith, 1995). In schools that create “just communities”—where virtually all

school decisions are made by the student-faculty collective, the defining features of democratic decision making are laid out and practiced. Students develop skills for participatory democracy, commitment to collective norms and personal responsibility (Power, Kohlberg, & Higgins, 1989).

3. *Educators must arrange learning experiences in a variety of collaborative community contexts.* Schools can provide opportunities for skill development by encouraging broad engagement with the community so that students can learn, apply, and hone their ethical competencies in real-life settings. The elders, leaders, and all citizens in the community are “funds of knowledge” and can be partners in coaching the students in their skill development. For in reality, students are apprentices to the community.

## 5. How Can a Program Be Sustained?

I present the ethical expertise model to teams of educators and ask that they include in their implementation design the following characteristics critical to sustainability:

- 1) *Integrate ethical skill development into standards-driven instruction.*
- 2) *Teach character across the curriculum in every subject and activity.*

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With these skills,  
students are  
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3) *Involve the whole community in adapting the model to local structures.* The full spectrum of the community must be involved in the adoption and adaptation of a program. In fact, each implementation of the model is unique because it is locally envisioned and locally controlled.

What about student outcomes? Our post-test data are just now being organized. But in a pilot study comparing participating classrooms with non-participating classrooms, we found significant increases only in the participating classrooms for pro-social responsibility, ethical identity and pro-social risk-taking (Narvaez et al. 2000).

## Summary and Conclusion

Moral character is best thought of as a set of teachable, ethically relevant skills. Ethical skill instruction should be embedded in standards-driven pedagogy. Ethical skills should be taught across the curriculum. With such an education, students will develop schemas of goodness and of justice. They will learn routines of helping and of reasoning. They will learn skills of leadership and of commitment. With these skills, they can take responsibility for ethical action in their neighborhoods and communities. They will be energized by memories of personal ethical action. With these skills, students are empowered to be active citizens who will make the fate of the nation their own. **EM**

*Darcia F. Narvaez, Ph.D., is a professor of psychology at the University of Notre Dame and serves as the Director of the Minnesota Community Character Education Partnership project, where teachers build skills development into regular classroom activities. Dr. Narvaez received her Ph.D. in educational psychology from the University of Minnesota.*

## “Looking into the (Ed School) Abyss”

(Continued from page 3)

I am pleased to say that the dean of UC Boulder’s School of Education resigned in the wake of our exposure of the reeducation camp he was running. That’s a start. No attempt at education reform is likely to succeed, however, as long as radical ideological commitments and pedagogies are permitted to trump common sense and common values in teacher training programs. The ed schools know this and, wed to their ideologies, choose the path of obstruction. Let’s bring their agenda into the open and see if it can stand the light of day. **EM**

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# PTA's Controversial Positions on Issues Cause of Membership Loss?

By Charlene Haar



Charlene Haar

**A**pproximately 1,300 delegates from state and international PTA affiliates met for the National PTA convention in San Antonio on June 22-25. The low turnout was a surprise, given the fact that Shirley Igo, the National PTA president,

is from Texas and that Texas reported a statewide membership of 710,000.

For the first time in recent memory, there was no convention theme but there appeared to be a new public relations theme: Every child, one voice. For those of us who have attended national PTA conventions over the years, comparisons with previous PTA conventions are inevitable. Because of bylaw changes approved last year, regional vice presidents no longer preside over regional meetings at the annual convention. As a result, there is now no venue for state PTA affiliates to announce gains or losses in PTA membership; however, past PTA president Ginny Markell told me that membership is down by about 4 percent, resulting in a current membership of about 6.2 million members.

Retaining current members and reaching out to the parents of new students in school and other community members were the topics of several workshops. Speakers offered planning and insight on how to tailor appeals to a variety of potential PTA members. Attendees were reminded that not all competition comes from other membership organizations; the Internet and dozens of other diversions may interfere with parental involvement. One presenter suggested that membership should be marketed as an investment in child, not as a solicitation for dues to the PTA as a charitable organization.

While several hundred delegates attended workshop sessions on how to increase membership, only 22 of us attended the workshop session on "Preventing Prejudice Through Diversity Education." Anne Thompson, a National PTA Board of Directors member from Florida, served as the workshop facilitator. Helen Cohen, Senior Director, Women's Educational Media, discussed the development of a controversial video, *That's a Family!* Second in a series of NEA-endorsed videos celebrating diverse lifestyles, *That's a Family!* highlights family structures that include single par-

ents, mixed-race families, mixed-religion families, same-sex families, divorced and stepfamilies, families with disabilities, and traditional families.

Not surprisingly, delegates who viewed the video during the workshop session raised concerns about the National PTA's support for this video (and similar videos) as a training tool for elementary students and parents. Some delegates from southern states praised the clever and informative presentation of the issues but noted that neither parents nor school administrators would accept the use of the video to encourage acceptance of homosexual-parent families. Delegates from two military base schools enthusiastically agreed. Other attendees agreed with Ms.

Cohen that same-sex families (two women with a child or two men with a child) are "here to stay," and "more and more such families are likely to be members of a PTA."

As part of the training, the producers also have available a teacher's guide, for use in preparing students and/or parents in a PTA meeting for a discussion on family diversity, prior to viewing the video. Post-video follow-up discussion ideas are also included in the guide. Even though some delegates warned the National PTA and the speaker that support of this and other similar videos and resources accounted for significant membership loss, Ms. Thompson and Ms. Cohen insisted on maintaining and promoting the PTA's support for its concept of family diversity, as well as the video.

In a second workshop session on how to implement the position statement adopted last year by the National PTA Board of Directors, almost none of the approximate 100 attendees was even aware that the PTA now opposes discrimination on the basis of "sexual orientation." Many delegates were still unaware at the close of the session because the discussions centered almost entirely on reaching out to fathers, minorities, and members with disabilities, as well as how to broaden PTA members' perceptions of others. There was almost no mention of how to deal with school bullies, the ostensible reason for the new PTA position

statement and the PTA's Guide for Respecting Differences.

As a result, those already concerned about the PTA's increasing disregard for traditional family values predict continued member dropout. Workshops on techniques to increase PTA membership will probably not attract many members as the PTA's family policies become better known.

The juried art exhibit known as the Reflections Program was a casualty of PTA budget cuts last year and remained a casualty this year. In view of the PTA dropping this excellent program—the only one that involves students—PTA criticisms of school districts that drop or reduce programs in

the arts when facing budget shortfalls is difficult to take seriously. Nevertheless, the highlights of the Sunday general session were performances and/or comments by the four talented, national winners in the Reflections Program.

Despite several hundred first-timers who were not involved in approving the national dues increase last year to \$1.75 per person, per year, money became an issue again. A bylaw change, which would have codified an already existing practice of sharing all Founders Day gifts with the National PTA, was soundly defeated.

Delegates' comments during the floor debate were mostly negative and critical of the effort to shift revenues to the National PTA.

The critical comments clearly frustrated president Shirley Igo during the business meeting, but there was a sense that she and other National PTA officers and some workshop presenters were under siege.

Competition from PTOs—parent and teacher organizations not affiliated with the PTA hierarchy—and criticism of some of the National PTA's positions on controversial issues have apparently made an impact on the nation's venerable PTA leaders. **EM**

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## Connecticut Schools Have Their Own Border Patrol

For some years, the Education Intelligence Agency (EIA) has followed “the black market in school choice”—parents lying or misrepresenting their place of residence in order to get their children into better public schools. The problem seems especially acute in the Northeast, where the urban public schools tend to be the worst, while their suburban counterparts are often the best the nation has to offer. The *Hartford Courant* periodically addresses the issue and last month published “Bouncers at the Schoolyard Gate” by reporters Jim Farrell and Steve Goode.

Farrell and Goode rode with Jon Searles, a former cop who is now a full-time “residency investigator” for Windsor Public Schools in Connecticut. Searles staked out the declared home of a middle school student to see if she emerged from the front door in the morning to head off to school. Two other girls did, but the student in question did not. She became one of the 71 disenrollments credited to Searles this year.

“School bus drivers, curious about a new passenger, might request an investigation,” write Farrell and Goode. “A school nurse may become suspicious when trying to reach the parent of a sick child during the day.” Other informants include landlords and neighbors. The reporters also noted that kids who pose discipline problems go to the top of the residency investigation list. **EM**

Source—Education Intelligence Agency’s EIA Communiqué. Visit their website at [www.eiaonline.com](http://www.eiaonline.com), or call them at 916-422-4373.

## Report Card on State Testing Programs Shows North Carolina as Number One

North Carolina, Texas, New York, Massachusetts, and Arizona have America’s best testing programs, according to “Testing the Testers 2002”, a new report from the *Princeton Review*. These ratings are based on 25 indicators in four key areas: alignment of a state’s test to its curriculum standards, quality of the test, openness of the testing program to public scrutiny, and the extent to which the accountability system supports school improvement. The aim of the report is to spotlight behavior that supports or undermines good teaching and learning, as the fifty states race to comply with the testing requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act. *Princeton Review* says this is the first of an annual series and that the criteria and methodology will be refined in subsequent editions. To download a copy, surf to [www.review.com/stateStudymsg.cfm](http://www.review.com/stateStudymsg.cfm). **EM**

Source—The Education Gadfly, news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation, [www.edexcellence.net/gadfly](http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly).

## More Students Eligible for Vouchers in Florida after Ten Schools Fail

The Florida “exit voucher” program that allows students in failing public schools to transfer to private schools at public expense will expand this year. Last week, 10 Sunshine State schools received their second F rating in four years, which makes their pupils—roughly 8,900 in all—eligible for the voucher program. Before this year’s results were announced, students from just two Florida schools were eligible for the program. In those two schools, about 10 percent of students applied for vouchers to private schools (though not all found private schools to take them), and 10 percent transferred to other public schools (which is also allowed under the state’s accounta-

bility system). The big increase in voucher-eligible schools is expected to fuel debate over the policy, as Gov. Jeb Bush, a voucher advocate, campaigns for re-election this year. **EM**

Source—The Education Gadfly, news and analysis from the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation. Website: [www.edexcellence.net/gadfly](http://www.edexcellence.net/gadfly).

## Partisan Pendants

That the teachers’ unions back Democrats is no surprise. They have for years. But why won’t they reveal the extent of that support?

Certainly, the unions are free, even duty-bound, to back candidates who share their views. And for the most part, that’s meant Democrats. In the 2000 election cycle, for instance, 96 percent of the \$6.1 million teachers’ unions gave to federal candidates went to Democrats, says the Center for Responsive Politics.

But that amount seems to pale next to the amount spent by the unions to back Democrats with in-kind services such as campaign advice, petition-gatherers and phone bank workers. The only problem: We don’t know just how much they’re spending. **EM**

Source—Investor’s Business Daily

### -Quote of the month-

“It is well-recognized that if you take away the mechanism of payroll deduction, you won’t collect a penny from these people, and it has nothing to do with voluntary or involuntary. I think it has to do with the nature of the beast, and the beasts who are our teachers.... [They] simply don’t come up with the money, regardless of the purpose.”

—NEA General Counsel Robert Channin, testifying before the U.S. District Court. Mr. Channin was trying to justify the NEA’s agency fees process and the use of those fees.



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