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HORACE

Student Development: How Essential School Practices and Designs Can Help

Students also develop thinking skills by learning to navigate the social, emotional, and ethical realms. How can teachers best coach kids in the habits of thoughtful adults and support them in their different rates of growth? And what does that imply for how we organize Essential schools, both in academic and in other areas?

BY KATHLEEN CUSHMAN

CLINTON HAD BOMBED IRAQ just as his impeachment vote loomed, and both of Deb Merriam's global studies classes wanted to talk about it. But as this teacher at the Parker Charter Essential School in Devens, Massachusetts left her second class of the day, she marveled at how different was the older teen-agers' discussion from that of their younger schoolmates.

"They were both great discussions," she said, "but they were at such different stages of development." The younger class grounded its discussion in specific questions —nailing down players, places, and events. Some students with little interest in other global conflicts paid new attention because of the furor the President's actions provoked among people they knew. Most kids sought the teacher's support at every turn.

"But in the older class I hardly said a word," Merriam noted. "The kids spent the whole time hashing out the ethics of the situation— whether the U.S. could or should remove Saddam, the sanctions, the timing of the attack." And even students who were unsure of their facts were able to garner them from the context as they took part in the group's lively parlay about justice.

That classic progression—from the concrete to the abstract, from an intense focus on the self to an ability to integrate the perspectives of others and form original ideas— characterizes not only students' cognitive development but also their social, emotional, moral and ethical growth, according to educational theorists from Jean Piaget to Lawrence Kohlberg and Robert Selman.

And as teachers commit themselves to Essential School principles —about knowing students well, about coaching them to progress on the basis of performance, about mixing them in heterogeneous groups, about democracy and equity— they face complex questions about how best to foster student development, not just intellectually but in all the realms of learning.

Some questions center on curriculum and instruction. If students understand an "essential question" (like "Whose America is this?") at different levels of abstraction, for example, how should the teacher structure a class project to allow for various entry points? In a diverse group of students, how can she offer the particular support and challenge each needs?

Some center on standards and assessment, which typically classify students by age and grade level, not by their developmental stage. If a tenth grader is working hard on her research paper, but can't yet synthesize her research into an original point of view, must the new tenth-grade standard call her deficient? How long should schools keep students whose academic development may never quite fit

Middle Schools Reflect Essential School Ideas

The past decade's move from "junior high schools" to "middle schools" came from a growing understanding of young adolescents' developmental needs, informed by the groundbreaking 1989 "Turning Points" report from the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development. Now new partnerships are building between Essential schools and the middle school reform movement, with support from the Turning Points Middle Grades School State Policy Initiative. In Boston, Carnegie funds CES's regional Center for Collaborative Education (CCE) to work with 16 of Boston's 23 middle schools as they make changes like these, which reflect both Turning Points philosophy and Essential School principles:

- Flexible schedules, groupings, academic focus, and learning opportunities.
- Small communities of learners coached by teams of teachers, creating a sense of belonging, a feeling among kids that their teachers know and watch out for them, and a diverse group of peers who know each other well and develop trust, a sense of safety, and the ability to learn together.
- Advisory groups that meet often enough so every student has a teacher who knows him or her well, fostering a school culture of decency and mutual respect.
- Academic work that crosses subject-area lines, and the time for teachers to meet and plan that work together so that it meets their students' needs.
- Structures that keep decision-making on curriculum and scheduling with teachers and kids in the team and in the building.
- Partnerships with families that treat them as allies in decisions about kids' lives and education.
- Connections with the community, as a learning resource and a place where students can actively contribute, collaborate, and connect academic learning with the things that are concrete to them.

the state's measuring stick? What about kids who show their growing abilities in other areas than book learning: social and emotional sophistication, for instance, or musical talent, or practical dexterity?

Taking note of not only developmental theory but recent research on learning styles and "multiple intelligences," more teachers are asking questions like these in the classroom. But the developmental approach also raises questions about the very purposes and designs of schools.

Instead of just teaching academic subjects, it implies, schools have a broader role: They teach students how to act in the social and ethical arenas of society. What implicit messages are they sending by the ways adults relate to each other, to students, to families, and to the larger community?

Developing Understanding

Teachers in developmentally focused schools notice many links between the Coalition's Ten Common Principles and the ideas they practice in the classroom. They may already be trying, for instance, to create many routes by which students may encounter academic material and many means by which they demonstrate what they know and can do.

To help students try out their growing abstract knowledge and ideas in an active, hands-on manner, teachers treat them as workers, often in social groups that help them make sense of what they are learning. Rather than "delivering" information, they coach students in activities that let them discover and construct knowledge for themselves.

In the early grades, teachers have long supported student development by emphasizing concrete hands-on materials, multiple learning styles, flexible age grouping, and cooperative learning activities. They encourage children to explore the concrete world, then coach them to begin to make sense of it through questions and reflections.

Whether that process takes place in a science investigation or as kids debate what's fair, it follows a similar pattern: kids move from the concrete to the abstract, from an intense focus on themselves to considering others' perspectives. The steps of learning take place one by one, each building on what the child has learned in the previous experience of exploration and growth.

As the number of Essential elementary schools grows, they have shared their developmental approach with schools up the K–12 pathway, at the Fall Forum and other collaborative gatherings. And through the Coalition's pilot partnership with the Developmental Studies Center (DSC) in Oakland,

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California, schools affiliated with the Massachusetts and Michigan CES Centers will have access to support for integrating children's social and ethical growth with their academic development. As well as coaching schools in its "whole child" outlook, DSC develops reading, mathematics, and "community-building" curricula to nurture qualities like kindness, helpfulness, responsibility, and respect in the primary grades.

Many Essential middle schools, too, have rooted their restructuring efforts in research on the developmental needs of early adolescents. Large schools that track students into tightly scheduled subject-area course periods, reformers assert, actually hamper learning in this crucial and volatile stage of life.

With longer time periods to work in, students can use the teacher and texts as resources and solve problems that cross disciplinary lines. Academic material holds more interest for adolescents, these schools have found, when it comes from students' own big questions and concerns. At the Academy for the Middle Years in Philadelphia, for instance, school-wide Essential Questions (such as "Who are we?", "Where did we come from?", and "Where are we going?") guide students' class work and link it to their personal development. Eighth-grade language arts students are researching career interests, writing resumes and inquiry letters and making presentations; other classes have explored their families' immigration histories.

Fixed Standards Don't Help

By adapting classroom tasks and activities, teachers with a developmental outlook try to pose just the tasks that students are ready to learn and do. This perspective has important implications for Essential school teachers, who often work with heterogeneous groups of students, yet aim toward mastery of ambitious academic concepts.

For one thing, they must help students experience enough content understanding to make the critical move to the next level of thinking about it. Unless they keep in mind the varied stages of their students, they risk losing them by jumping over a crucial step.

One new science teacher in an Essential middle school, for example, noticed that some of her ninth-grade students had a hard time connecting their observational data to the hypothesis they were intended to support or refute. "I suddenly realized that their thinking was still too concrete to move back and forth comfortably between what they saw and the abstract idea it might represent," she says. "Given that, was it fair for me to assess them all against the same expectations?" In the end, she built extra structure and guid-

Do Boys and Girls Need Different Things in School?

Research interest has grown over the last decade in how schools and families can provide different kinds of support to help both girls and boys develop self-confidence and thrive academically. Studies by the American Association of University Women, for example, observed that teachers call on boys more in class, give them positions of more responsibility, and the like. And a body of psychological research indicates that girls learn and interact in a more collaborative, less hierarchical and competitive way, which traditional classrooms may not support.

Schools do poorly by boys in other ways, the data show. Boys do outnumber girls by about three to one in the top ten percent of math and science performers, a major University of Chicago study found, and in some science and vocational aptitude tests, no girls scored in the top three percent. But the Chicago study also shows that boys predominate at the bottom of the heap, especially in reading and writing, where the lowest performers outnumber girls by a margin of two to one. Harvard University psychiatrist William S. Pollack argues that most schools fail to accommodate boys' different learning styles, and shunt them disproportionately into special needs classes. And the college population has been steadily tilting in favor of female students. Twenty years ago more boys than girls went to college; now, 58 percent of high school male graduates make it to college, compared to 67 percent of females.

Some Essential schools with an interest in meeting their students' varying developmental needs are looking for ways to adapt their structures and teaching practices to be more appropriate for both genders. The law frowns on separate-sex classes, making it difficult, say, to have a math class aimed at raising girls' self-confidence and skills. So how can schools support girls' needs for quiet, collaborative settings, boys' needs for high levels of action, and both genders' need to express themselves with sensitivity and confidence?

Perhaps answers will come from the kind of individual and small-group activities made possible by lower student loads; perhaps from outside the academic classroom, through advisory-type activities. Philadelphia's Academy for the Middle Years, for example, has successfully instituted separate lunch areas for boys and girls. "It started as a pragmatic response to the lunchroom's physical layout," says principal Holly Perry. "Then we realized many of our lunchroom problems were disappearing with the change. Boys want to eat quickly and get out to do something active; the girls tend to linger and talk with each other."

Boys and girls aren't the only area where such equity issues arise in the classroom. A growing research base is challenging teachers to vary their approaches to support the academic development of children with different racial and cultural backgrounds as well, an issue to be addressed in a coming issue of HORACE.

Confronting the Moral Questions Within Academic Disciplines

How can teachers help high school students explore moral and ethical questions with the thoughtfulness necessary for a democratic society to function fully? How can they build academic courses and a school-wide culture around questions that really matter, that push students to consider what it means to live a good, meaningful life, to promote justice, or to contribute to the well-being of society?

In this climate of "covering the content," it isn't easy, says CES Director of Research and Professional Development Kathy Simon, so, with funding from the Shinnyo En Foundation, the Coalition has launched a new national project to foster that process. The "Essential Moral Questions" project will work with Essential school teachers to devise academic curricula that pay close attention to both the intellectual and the moral elements of these subject areas. It will help them develop discussion-leading skills to address such questions, and to foster a school culture that promotes in-depth discussion of important moral issues.

Across the disciplines, teachers tend to quickly dismiss politically and morally charged topics when they arise. But how can we promote critical thinking if we are shy about tackling our critical issues?

"As a nation, the culture of our classrooms is particularly adverse to serious exploration of moral issues—indeed, of anything potentially controversial or not easily tested," says Simon, whose research at Stanford University explored this subject. Almost all classroom conversation between teachers and students, research shows, involves the transmission and recitation of names, dates, and formulae; across the disciplines, teachers tend to quickly dismiss politically or morally charged topics when they arise. Even important moral and ethical concepts like "equity," "freedom," and "civic responsibility," Simon observes, are likely to be taught by delivering definitions, memorizing specific texts, drilling in the structures and formulae, and the like. And such topics as slavery, the "American dream," civil rights, immigration, crime and punishment, and organized labor are most often approached as chunks of information to be ingested, not living, complex questions to be explored.

When controversial topics do occasionally arise, Simon says, they are typically debated in ways that drive students into polarized positions, with little opportunity to come to understand or respect the opinions of their classmates. "Most students graduate from high school," she says, "with little or no practice in thinking carefully, compassionately, or creatively about the key moral issues with which our society continues to grapple."

For example, teachers can open up academic discourse on moral questions like these, which require students to use substantive evidence to form and discuss their opinions:

- How should a society distribute its wealth?
- What, if anything, constitutes a just war?
- Who, if anyone, is an "outsider" in American society? How do the experiences of an outsider differ from those of an insider?
- What forces give rise to cruelty among human beings?
- How has race mattered, and how does it matter, in America?
- What does it mean to be a "criminal"? Has this definition varied from society to society? What is society's role in dealing with criminals?
- What scientific or technological discoveries have had important impact on the social world? Why and how?
- Are there scientific discoveries that we simply should not pursue?
- Is the natural world, by definition, good? Or is it morally neutral? Which sorts of changes in the natural world, if any, are appropriate for human beings to make?

Even when teachers do design curriculum around questions with moral content, the pedagogy remains very difficult. How does one conduct responsible, probing discussions around controversial issues in the public school context? How does one discuss topics about which there may be strong disagreement, yet honor the diverse perspectives held by students, their families, and the wider community? Most teachers find it easier, research shows, simply to refrain from talking in depth about controversial topics—a practice that may hamper students' moral and intellectual development. As Columbia University education professor Nel Noddings observes, schools cannot hope to promote critical thinking if they are shy about tackling critical—and often controversial—issues.

As CES commits itself to democracy and equity in its new Tenth Common Principle, new moral questions present themselves. What does it mean to "model democratic practices"? Is democracy a particular form of government, a style of discussion, a way of behaving day to day? What does it mean to "challenge all forms of inequity"? Does this require people in the school to take certain kinds of political actions? Is it ever possible that the demands of democracy and the demands of equity could be in conflict? Not just classrooms but whole school communities, Simon urges, must learn to discuss such morally charged issues.

ance into the lab report, and gave extra coaching and support by asking key questions at the right time.

Similarly, a student's success on a tenth-grade research project may depend on his readiness to go past the literal material he has assembled and form a perspective of his own. "Most kids are ready to compare two points of view, weigh them, and choose one," says Jim Culbertson, who coordinates the Coalition Center in Pennsylvania. "But some won't yet be able to synthesize that material; that's a more sophisticated developmental stage."

Like Piaget, good teachers look to the "wrong answers" for clues. When they hear something unexpected from a student, they look for the gap between their expectation and what a student can currently do. "When kids don't 'get it,' we shouldn't be discouraged," one Essential school counselor says. "It's a great opportunity to adjust our coaching."

To help students learn, Culbertson notes, "We have to know them very well. And we need to build all kinds of choices and scaffolding into our teaching practices." As well as developing the intellectual skills students have, teachers can spur them on to new abilities by posing problems that can't be solved by what they know already.

The natural give and take of a mixed group can help this process, as students grow intrigued by the thinking of students who are a step ahead. But teaching kids at different levels also presents a major challenge to teachers with too many students and too little time.

"Schools typically solve this by age-grouping kids, tracking them, or putting them in special education classes," says Ted Sizer. "But these are bureaucratic solutions to complex problems. We need to go past them to create much more thoughtful designs for how and where we teach and learn."

Restitution: A Coaching Approach to Discipline

Asking "Why did you do that?" or "How many times do I have to tell you not to do that?" only directs attention to student behavior problems, makes them defensive, and encourage them to produce excuses for their failure, says Norma True Spurlock, a counselor at the University of Florida's P. K. Yonge Developmental Research School, headed by CES Executive Board president Fran Vandiver. Instead, she helps teachers use a more positive system of restitution, which focuses on solutions, recognizing the student's need to belong. "All behavior reflects a student's values," she says. "It's chosen, purposeful, and internally motivated." She recommends asking this sequence of questions:

- **What do we believe about . . . [respecting others? respecting property? being on time and on task? being where we're supposed to be?] This ties the student's behavior to the shared values the school holds, and reminds him to do the right thing because it's right, not to avoid pain.**
- **What problems did you cause for others?** (Looks at the consequences of one's actions.)
- **What can you do to fix this?** (Focuses on the solution; restores any damage caused. Offers options: fix; replace; do something for the class; pay back with money, time, labor, etc.)
- **You had a reason for doing this. What did you need?** (Recognizes that behavior is purposeful and internally motivated.)
- **Can you think of a way to do this that won't cause anyone else a problem?** (Focuses on the solution.)
- **You're not the only one who has ever made a mistake. Do you want to be the kind of person who fixes his or her mistakes?** (Recognizes that behavior is chosen and can be changed.)
- **What can you do to fix this? What part are you willing to do?** (Focuses on a positive solution that requires time, energy, and effort from the offender; restores self-esteem; builds relationships. "I'm sorry" is not enough.)
- **Do you think this is a place where people care about you?** (Emphasizes need to belong.)
- **Will you think about it?** (Emphasizes student's choice.)

Coaching Personal Growth

Both through the content itself and through the actual processes of learning, schools can reinforce important habits—of inquiry, of collaboration, of confidence, and of caring—that can be crucial for students' very survival.

If they feel connected, understood, and treated fairly in school, kids are less likely to suffer emotional distress, abuse substances, or take part in other destructive activities, a national longitudinal study on adolescent health reported in 1997. Other research shows that when teachers hold higher hopes and expectations for kids, they do better in school.

Schools can pay attention to these areas of growth in various contexts, both in academic classes and outside them. (See sidebar, page 4.) But many Essential schools make a particular place for such work in the advisory groups that have grown common throughout the Coalition.

Seventh and eighth graders at Rancho San Joaquin Middle School in Irvine, California take part in a graded "advisement program," in which roughly 20 students meet with a teacher twice weekly for two years to reflect on their academic work, talk through ethical issues, chart their future plans, and practice civic responsibility in a community-

From 16 to 20, Student Development Demands a Different Kind of Schooling

Schools often dismally fail the developmental needs of young people between the ages of sixteen and twenty, concluded a year-long study just completed by the Coalition of Essential Schools. Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts and led by Kathy Simon, CES's Director of Research and Professional Development, the "Sixteen to Twenty Project" looked critically at current educational practice in late high school and early college, and came up with provocative suggestions and "design principles" for how it should change in five broad areas: college admissions, standards, curriculum, pedagogy, and institutional size.

Even high schools and colleges with good reputations, the report concluded, rarely offer the intellectual stimulation or the room for social and emotional development that young adults need. Anonymous among thousands of others and rarely known well by even one adult, students have little choice but to sit and listen to class material that has little resonance with their own experience or questions. Graded and ranked against their classmates according to tests that reward cramming more than deep thought, they are sorted and stratified ostensibly by ability, but most often by race and class. A significant portion drop out virtually unnoticed.

> *"The school was structurally incapable of taking me seriously," one student at a well regarded suburban high school said.*

Yet throughout the early 1990's, approximately 65 percent of all high school seniors held jobs for pay; the majority of these students worked at these jobs more than 20 hours a week. More than 4 percent of young women from 15 to 19 give birth every year, and approximately 13 percent of young people between 14 and 24 are arrested. Fragile and dependent these young adults are not, yet few receive from their schools the respect and responsibility that could inspire discipline and ambition rather than lethargy and apathy. "The school was structurally incapable of taking me seriously," said one student of her well-regarded, wealthy suburban high school.

What would help? The problem lies in school design and policy, this report asserted. In particular:

• **School structures should allow close, personal, regular contact between young adults and older mentors.** This step—most effectively achieved by creating smaller schools—will have academic as well as social and emotional effects. "Students become motivated to achieve high standards when trusted adults in their lives deem them important," the report concluded. "It is virtually inconceivable that students would do high quality work in the absence of close-in, caring coaches to provide regular encouragement, guidance, and feedback." Truly high standards and strict accountability come about not through legal mandates, it argued, but through respectful human relationships. When schools are small enough to know their students well, teaching and learning improve and institutions better provide the supports and services students need.

• **The work students do at this age should have a place in the world,** feeding their idealistic sense that they can have an impact on real problems and answer real needs. In combination with an intellectually rigorous curriculum, "real world" work is crucial to the intellectual and social development of young adults. And because so many students have jobs outside school, the report noted, those jobs simply must nurture their intellectual and social growth. School should provide a place where students may come back and reflect on their experiences in the world.

• **In school and out, students at this age should work with people both older and younger than themselves.** "We typically warehouse 2,000 fourteen to eighteen year olds together, away from adults, then wonder why they are so susceptible to peer pressure," noted one contributor to the report. Yet adolescents act at once more adult—responsible, diligent, considerate—and more childlike—curious, enthusiastic, jovial—when kept "out of packs." And they rise to the occasion when positioned to act as mentors to youngsters, colleagues of adults, or sources of support to the elderly.

• **Rigid age-grading must go.** If standards are to guide student promotion, schools and colleges must seriously rethink the current age-graded system, establishing more fluid and contextual boundaries within and between institutions. Students might receive college credit for working in their family business; high schools might provide close tutoring support to the 20-year-old student who needs that environment; high school students might take college courses during their junior and senior years.

• **College admissions criteria should clearly promote performance-based assessments and learning that takes place outside the conventional classroom.** Current systems reward memorization, not exploring ideas or making connections between information, ideas, and actions outside school; tests and grades pit classmates against one another with very high stakes. And though expeditionary learning, apprenticeships, and other "real world" experiences profoundly influence the growth of young adults, they rarely appear on traditional transcripts. If college admissions offices made clear to high schools and their students that demonstrating their learning through performance, not tests, carried important weight, they could have important effects on secondary schools' structures and classroom practices.

based project. The program reflects the Irvine school board's decision to make values such as responsibility, honesty, courage, and compassion part of every school's mission.

"People have grown steadily happier about the program for the past several years," says Erin Hughes, who led a team of Rancho teachers in developing a set curriculum for the program, complete with calendar, lesson plans, activities, and rubrics.

"The seventh graders explore a different ethical value every month," she says, "and work on teambuilding and cooperation skills." In one exercise, students write themselves a "truth letter" attempting complete honesty about something that matters deeply to them, then seal the letter for no one else's eyes. In another, they hash out the ethics of telling "little white lies," or stealing to achieve a necessary good.

In eighth grade, advisement groups go on to design a class project answering the question, "What can we do together to make a difference in our community?" Every group must create a written plan for its project, present it for approval by the school's Site Council, and assess the project for its effectiveness and its value to all participants.

The advisement group also supports students' academic growth in several ways. It helps them learn what to expect as they move on to eighth grade and then high school. And at regular intervals, kids use the class period to gather academic work from other classes, analyze it according to school-wide rubrics, and prepare a portfolio including reflections on why one piece is a "personal best" and how they can do better on another. Finally, they present the portfolios to their families in a thrice-yearly conference.

Students Taking Leadership

As they work through abstractions like fairness, responsibility, and morality, students are practicing ever higher levels of thinking; and so some high schools create courses with that as their content. At Maine's Gorham High School, students in a senior elective course called "Human Nature" investigate philosophical and ethical questions as they apply to their own lives. "They ask, 'How do I determine what is good and what is evil? By what code of ethics do I try to live?'" teacher Mike Carter says.

Ideas like these turn far more concrete when service-learning or other such programs put them into a community context. Gorham High School trains and supports a network of students to serve as "Natural Helpers," in whom other students can confide personal problems when they need an empathetic ear. Aside from "red flag" situations involving abuse, suicide, or the like, such information is held in strict confidence; students learn simply to listen supportively, to help others sort out issues and come to their own conclusions, and to refer their peers when necessary to the appropriate professional help. The group also plans school service events, like a breakfast for new students and a program of guest speakers about life issues that students face.

"As a freshman I had a difficult time adjusting," one senior applicant wrote to Natural Helpers. "I didn't want to come to school in the morning and went to sleep crying at night. I now hope I can be there for students who are having difficulties as I did, and be someone who is trustworthy, honest, and helpful."

Students also learn by taking on tasks and responsibilities commonly assigned to adults in schools, from repairing computers to leading the work of Essential school reform. At Michigan's Caledonia High School, which offers a course where students discuss books like *Horace's Compromise*, students routinely take visitors around, present the school at workshops, and even represent it at the CES Congress.

Some 250 students have participated in summer Leadership Institutes at Missouri's regional CES Center, carrying out action research in their schools and presenting their perspectives in portfolio form at the 1998 Fall Forum. "One principal told me his kids' participation was driving the reform in his exploring-level school," says Laura Thomas, who coordinates the program.

Twin Buttes High School in Zuni, New Mexico is one of many Essential schools where a weekly "community meeting" builds a sense of shared responsibility and respect among teachers and students. Principal Linda Belarde also co-teaches a class about personal and social responsibility with the school counselor.

School-Day Morality

Are all these matters the rightful province of schools? Though some critics would have it otherwise, "Paying attention to the whole child's development cannot be dismissed as a mushy emphasis on 'self-esteem,'" Ted Sizer declares.

Instead of training their gaze exclusively on academic inputs into student achievement, he says, schools must recognize how hard it is to separate a young person's cognitive development from the social, emotional, and moral realms.

Let Us Hear Your Voice

You can lend your own voice to the Essential School conversation about this subject, by going to the CES Web site at http://www.essentialschools.org It contains the text and research citations for this issue, as well as more resources, suggestions as to how to use this HORACE as a tool for further discussion, and the opportunity for an electronic conversation about these issues.

But more important, they must take a close look at how their own policies and structures affect the way students both think and act.

Late at night, when a student looks at the 30 pages she can't read before English the next day and figures out how to bluff it so that the teacher won't catch on, the school has failed her, Sizer argues. And when her teacher settles for a second-rate discussion of a text she can't quite remember because she has 150 students to teach the next day, the school has failed her, too.

Such routine school-day choices, described in Ted and Nancy Sizer's forthcoming book, *The Students Are Watching: Teaching for a Worthy Life* (Beacon Press), carry both moral and intellectual weight, the authors assert. As frequent out of the classroom as in it, these choices deeply affect student learning, providing vivid models of what adults deem important, and why.

When school people choose whether to grapple with a controversial topic, or whether to sort students in ways that determine their futures, or whether they should push against the status quo, they are coaching students in the intellectual, ethical, and social habits that last a lifetime, the Sizers say.

As Essential schools explore that territory, they face a thicket of district, state, and national policies—from curriculum mandates to college admission—that inhibit and constrain those decisions.

In overcoming those obstacles, they will turn their schools into the proving ground where kids grow day by day toward becoming, as Eric Schaps of the Developmental Studies Center says, the "neighbors, doctors, senators, and friends" for whom we all are hoping. ❑

Moral Questions Schools Should Ask Themselves

"To find the core of a school, don't look at its rulebook or even its mission statement," Ted and Nancy Sizer advise in their forthcoming book, *The Students Are Watching*. "Look at the way the people in it spend their time, how they relate to each other, how they tangle with ideas. Look for the contradictions between words and practice, with the fewer the better. Try to estimate the frequency and the honesty of its deliberations." A school's quest for greater consistency between its words and its actions should start, they propose, with questions such as these:

- Is more expected of both students and teachers than is possible to do well?
- Do conditions in the school allow each student to be known well?
- How does this school pace itself? Is there time during the school day to work, time to reflect, and time to rest?
- Are the expectations for students and teachers clear?
- Are the incentives and opportunities for clearly demonstrated work clear and pervasive within a school?
- In its presentation and recommendation of students for college admission and job placement, does the school absolutely insist on accuracy as well as advocacy?

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