

**THE PEW FORUM ON RELIGION & PUBLIC LIFE
FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER**

**TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:
WHERE DO WE GO FROM HERE?**

THURSDAY, MAY 22, 2003

RELIGION AND MORAL EDUCATION

**MODERATOR: DIANE BERRETH, ASSOCIATION FOR SUPERVISION
AND CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

PANELISTS:

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MARVIN BERKOWITZ, UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI, ST. LOUIS
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*Transcript by:
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CHARLES HAYNES: In planning all of this, Melissa and Marcia and I knew this was going to be a big task, to cover so many topics. Then we thought, what do we leave out? Do we not cover moral education? Do we not deal with the science issue? Let's just leave out the Bible controversy. And we just couldn't do that. We could have had an entire conference on any one of these sessions; I think most of you would probably agree. That's a way of saying, I'm sorry we haven't had more time to relax and converse. But the goal was to try to get the major topics on the table for the conference; and then we will do something after the conference: a publication and continuing the conversation around the country.

If anyone this morning is new to the conference, I'm Charles Haynes, and I work here at the First Amendment Center, which is part of the Freedom Forum; and we have joined with the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life to put together this conversation. Everybody here would have a great deal to say if we put them on a panel, and that's another frustration: We would like to hear more from everybody. But I hope this couple of days starts the conversation, and we can continue to have dialogue and continue to get your input and wisdom about where this whole area is going.

Let me just say a couple of words of introduction to the panel and then turn it over to our moderator as quickly as possible. This issue of the relationship of teaching about religion to moral education or morality or ethics has been a very hot issue since the beginning of the post-*Schempp* controversy and questions about how you deal with religion in curriculum. Folks in the '70s and early '80s tried to do this around the country, and they had a hard time. Everyone heard "teaching about religion," and thought, "make good people, be moral," so they tried to say teaching about religion has nothing to do, ever, with moral education, with character, and so forth. That didn't work because, of course, one can't separate it that neatly.

So during the last 15 years, there has been some more discussion about how the two intersect, and this morning we're going to look at the challenges of that, the questions around that. Diane Berreth is the best person I know to moderate this, for all kinds of reasons. First, she's an outstanding educator, and you have a bio, so I don't want to go through all of her things. But the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [<http://www.ascd.org/>], under her leadership over these past 15-plus years that we have worked together, has really taken clear and important stands on some of these issues and issued courageous statements on religion in the curriculum. Even before some of the consensus statements came out, ASCD had an important statement – a booklet, really – on dealing with religion in the curriculum; taking leadership among, I think, many educational groups. Then they followed up with an important statement on character education or moral education in the public schools. Diane has worked in both of these arenas intensely, and she was actually part of the National Council on Religion

and Public Education, in those pre-consensus statement days that I talked about yesterday. She has served as president and still is on the board of the Character Education Partnership [<http://www.character.org/>]. She has worn both hats and bridges both communities, and so we're delighted that she has agreed to moderate this discussion.

DIANE BERRETH: The panel and I are delighted to be with you today, and because I think that we are known by our daily acts, to hearken back to what Jon Butler said the first evening, I'm not going to spend too much time on bios. But I do want you to know that our panelists come to us with experience and wisdom to share that's grounded in their lives.

Marvin Berkowitz, on my immediate left, is the Sanford N. McDonnell Professor of Character Education at the University of Missouri-St. Louis. That's a new chair, and Marvin is the first person to hold it. He is a developmental psychologist, and way back when, when Marvin and I first met each other, he was at Marquette and working with more of a higher-ed based group, the Association for Moral Education [<http://www.amenetwork.org/>].

Linda McKay, on Marvin's left, is also in a new position, brand new in the U.S. Department of Education, in character education. She's senior advisor to the deputy undersecretary in the Office of Safe and Drug-Free Schools. If it were up to me, it would be the office of character education, and safe and drug-free schools would be under that. Linda and I have also worked together for a long time. She lived, and still does on weekends, in St. Louis, Missouri, where she is associated with a multi-district program, CHARACTERplus [<http://info.csd.org/staffdev/chared/characterplus.html>], that has probably given us the largest concentration of districts that have focused on character education for the longest period of time in the United States. And I should mention – truth in advertising – Marvin, Linda, and I all do or have served on the board of the Character Education Partnership, as has Charles, so we do share that history.

Thank goodness Matthew Spalding is with us, because he has not served on the board of the Character Education Partnership. (Laughter.) He directs the B. Kenneth Simon Center for American Studies at the Heritage Foundation. I told him he sounded like an historian to me, which he tells me is his real area of interest, though his doctorate is in government. I will let Matthew tell you later about how he has embarked on a new career of teaching character education at home with his new children. (Laughter) I think it's a great group.

In kicking off, I just wanted to mention that the work of teaching about religions in public schools and teaching moral education is certainly not new, but I'm not going to go back in history to discuss it with you. I don't have data on teaching about religions in public schools, in terms of its prevalence, though there certainly has been heightened interest in it in the last 10 to 15 years. A lot of it has been because of Charles' work and that of his colleagues, some of whom are in this room.

I can tell you that there has been a true resurgence of interest in moral education, known by public educators today primarily as character education, in the last decade. If you hear some of us speaking about character education, we're using the terms character education and moral education interchangeably. I'm going to just give you the Character Education Partnership definition of that, and it's a simple one: Good character consists of understanding, caring about and acting on core ethical values. "Understanding" means that you have an intellectual apprehension of core ethical values, and we probably do the best job of that in schools, of any of those three areas. "Caring about" means that you have an emotional connection, if you will, a moral feeling about your acts. And the third part, "acting on," speaks to moral action. Those are interesting elements in an of themselves.

I can tell you that, in recent Gallup polls and other polls, the American public has been clear about wanting core moral values taught in public schools. The one they rank highest over the last decade is honesty, with 95 percent of the public in favor of teaching that. So the public is there and the schools have lagged behind somewhat, but there has been a significant resurgence of character education in the schools, particularly at the elementary level.

Marcia asked us to explore the relationship between religious worldviews and moral education in the public schools, and the challenges and opportunities inherent in that relationship. So, to get started, I'm going to ask each of the panelists their perspective on what the most important issue is facing schools at the intersection of religion and moral education. I'm going to start with Linda.

LINDA MCKAY: Thank you. I am delighted to be here. I appreciate any chance I have to talk about character education. I have said many times I have a profession on my heart, and that is something that I don't know how many of us can say that. But that really is what I am working in now.

When I got the question from Diane, I wanted to start with Webster's Dictionary defining some of those words, because I think that that is where we are as a society now, when we think is what is moral education, what is character education. So I went to our friend Webster, and "moral," it said, was "of or concerned with the principles of right or wrong in relation to human action and character." The word character is there in the moral definition. Then if you go to "education," it's defines as "to provide training, knowledge, or via a formal training." That is what we are about when we look at moral education/character education, we're being intentional about it. But then I looked up "character," and it's "the combination of emotional, intellectual, and moral qualities distinguishing one person or group from another."

I thought it was interesting: There's nothing in those words that I read that is controversial. So why is this so hard? Needless to say, what's hard is when we move to answer the question: What do we mean by moral values, moral character? When we talk about the challenges we have in public schools, one of the greatest is how we can define what we mean by moral education or character education as it relates to specific character

traits – our specific moral values – and not walk into the area based on religious belief, but based on a universal value belief, which is a word that I hear a lot of times in the field.

Instead of one issue, I broke it down into the words of courage and commitment. I think that's a major issue we have before us as we look at moving into doing this in a more formal, intentional way. I think trust and lack of trust are going to be some of our major issues, and wisdom. I think that's what I want to spend a little bit of time on when I talk about what I think the main issues are.

In terms of courage and commitment, to move into this as a community, whether it's a local school district or a society at large, it takes a lot of courage to finally say: "I care enough about this that I'm going to try and do this." Courage and commitment also mean time, which is something that I definitely hear in schools is a challenge. To say we're going to stop and we're going to talk about how we might operate this building differently, and look at moral character education – that's, I think, one of the major issues we have ahead of us, as is finding the courage to do so.

When I began in this 15 years ago, I began as a parent. My background was in nonprofits, working with children's groups. Professionally, I could see we were losing too many kids, and it didn't matter where our children lived. They could be inner city, they could be in the most wealthy suburban area, but we were losing too many; and it wasn't just drugs, sex, alcohol, it was valuing education, valuing their lives. So, to have that courage to say, in public schools, "We're going to talk about character traits, we're going to talk about moral education, and we can do this," it takes a lot of courage to do that. So I think a major issue is courage, commitment, trust.

When you do that, one of the major things you need is trust around that table, trust around that school building, that what you're going to be moving into isn't going to violate someone's rights, it isn't going to be indoctrination of a religion, and it isn't going to be something that the majority of the community would not be going along with, but also that one person is not going to sabotage. To do that and, to come around that table and to start developing trust is a major issue. Early on there was a conference meeting – Diane was here, too – where people from service learning came together with people from character and moral education. And in Missouri, where I work, service learning had always been part of what we had done; it was never separate. But we got to this meeting and we found out people from the service learning field were extremely suspect of the people in the character education field, and for me, that was a real shock. So we had to start trying to build trust at that meeting, to work our way through that.

Another example of trust building is my coming to the Department of Education. I am a political appointee in the department in character education. I applied over two years ago, before President Bush was even inaugurated, because I decided I wanted to work nationally. But when I arrived at the department, there was definitely an attitude of, "What is this woman? Why is she here? What is character education?" And so, again, I

knew that a major issue for me was going to be building that trust, which then does lead to understanding.

MS. BERRETH: Thank you, Linda. Five minutes goes past very quickly.
(Laughter.)

MS. MCKAY: It does.

MS. BERRETH: So Linda has talked about issues having to do with the specifics of how you play our character and moral education, and particularly issues of character and trust. I want to ask Marvin the same question: What do you see as the largest issue, the biggest issue at the intersection of moral education and teaching about religion in the schools?

MARVIN BERKOWITZ: Clearly, this will be my decided bias, but I want to do, in essence, a figure ground shift with this one. Given where I'm coming from, for me, character/moral/values/civics/democratic/citizenship education is the grounding force for the ability to do religious education effectively. I think Charles and Warren – or I should do Warren and Charles, let's get them in the right order from the book – articulate this nicely when they talk about the civil classroom, the civic classroom. So let me play that out a little bit for you.

There are a number of analogies, first of all. As far as I'm concerned, teaching or educating in general is, and should be, a calling. It should be a calling no less than a calling to religious life or military life, it should be a calling to service the children. And we have to put at the forefront of this, at all times, is the fact that when we are dealing with schools and dealing with children, the first and almost only issue has to be the welfare and development and flourishing of kids. We lose that so often. We lose that in a variety of ways which I won't get into.

Therefore, when we do religious education or character education, we can't use kids, to use a Kantian notion, as a means to an end – to promote religion or for some other reason. We have to do it for the good of the kids. The main way we do this is we create a context in schools which is appropriate for kids' flourishing. From my perspective, that means creating a caring, civil school and classroom in which we promote those values that we believe, universally, all children should attain; and you have heard some of that already from my two colleagues on my right and my left over here. We create norms of civil engagement in the classroom, shared norms, and we promote character traits in children that we consider to be universal.

Now that leads me to another piece of this. If we want to deal with universality here, we need to come together around the table with all of our multiple voices and find the common ground. We know that's doable, because I have seen it done in so many communities, very diverse communities, with representation from all the voices in this room and yet others. We can find that, and if we can come together and say, "Here's the shared moral agenda that we all want. All of our religious faiths and nonreligious

worldviews agree that being respectful and being responsible, being caring and being fair resonate/fit completely with our worldviews.” Then we have something to work from. And I think that’s a very important piece of all this.

I remember, years ago, asking a colleague of mine at Marquette University – actually a retired, elderly Jesuit theologian, a wonderful man – “You have put your whole life into a worldview for which you have made some serious sacrifices and dedicated yourself amazingly. I’m Jewish, I don’t even believe in some of the major tenets of what you have dedicated your life to” – and this was an ecumenical study group – “How do you make sense of me? How do you deal with me?” And his answer was, “There’s one God. You have your way of understanding it and I have my way of understanding it, and that’s okay.” And I thought, there’s a man who can dedicate his life to a particular understanding of God and the path to God and so on, and still integrate into that respect for my way of finding my path; and I thought it was a brilliant move.

I also spent a year at the Air Force Academy, learning about the chaplaincy there – which is an intriguing notion, for those of you who haven’t dealt with the military chaplaincy. In fact, there was a wonderful First Amendment Case that I’m sure the First Amendment folks here know about, Goldman vs. Weinberger, which Rabbi Israel Dresen – I think that I got his name right – adjudicated. They have to learn to serve any worldview, including the atheist, the nontheist, the Satanist, the Wicca; you name it, they have to learn to serve that, and they find ways to do that. There are Southern Baptist Convention folks who are chaplains in the military and learn how to minister to others with a different worldview. So if we can find the common ground and then create the environment in the school and the classroom which is respectful of others, of others’ voices, we will be doing something very important. Lastly, because I’m probably about out of time –

MS. BERRETH: Yes.

MR. BERKOWITZ: Okay. (Laughter.) Something I mentioned yesterday is that we need to take very seriously that distinction between the moral ground and the ground of social conventions. Religion has much more than just morality, but it certainly has got in there. But even very young children understand that distinction, and throughout our lives, we intuitively deal with those domains differently. If we program those into schools as if they’re identical, then we are doing a great injustice to the difference between a universal prescription about right and wrong and a man-made agreement about a way we want to live in community; and they are not the same thing.

MS. BERRETH: Thank you, Marvin. Okay, Matthew.

MATTHEW SPALDING: Thank you. Good morning. What Diane was referring to is that my wife and I returned just a few weeks ago from adopting two children from Russia, and so I have a three-and-one-half-year-old boy who speaks – who babbles - in Russian and speaks virtually no English. (Laughter.) I speak in English, sometimes babble - (laughter) – but I speak virtually no Russian. But I have learned that

we have had no problems so far with values clarification in my household. (Laughter.) Human nature is true and these things do work.

I'm coming to this as an outsider, as has already been mentioned; and I'm going to come to it as somewhat of a critic, although a friendly critic. I'm dubious of this particular issue. I want to make a distinction between the discussion you had yesterday about religion and its role in the schools, and commend the book, which I read through, and the work you have done in trying to show that consensus and move in that direction. The criticism of the overextension of secularism, the turn to science and away from religion, I think all of that is excellent and a move in the right direction.

Having said that, I think this is a slightly different question. There is a connection between religion and morality, very clearly; not only in a larger sense, but in the practical sense. George Washington, who I have written about extensively, had it right: Our religion and morality are the pillars of character. But having said that, I have some questions about the notion of a character education movement and how it's being done. There has been a vast improvement.

But I have questions about its methodology, the notion of an add-on – you know, “Let's add character formation to our list of things to be done.” It's emphasis on critical thinking as opposed to habit formation. It's taught through literature and history and stories and example. This is not rationalism, especially when we're talking about children. It tends to emphasize the soft values as opposed to the robust virtues. That's probably the heart of my criticism. It has gotten rid of a lot of the baggage of the harsh relativism of the past, but it has not gotten rid of all the baggage. To teach character demands judgmentalism: There's right, but there's also wrong; there are virtues, and there are also vices. I also don't necessarily like the notion of values by consensus in the first place. What if you have a bad consensus? Let's say you live in Germany in 1936. What's your values consensus?

Having said that, the answer to your question, in my opinion, is that the issue here is not the need for more religion and character education, although I recognize that religion is extremely important. I also recognize that schools must recognize the important role of religion in character formation. But in terms of the public schools, what we need in character education is more character, good character, solid character, robust notions of character.

Above and beyond that, I think it's the role of the public schools to essentially get out of the way. They have a role in forming character – all education is character forming by its very nature – but the real task of character formation is done by churches, families and communities. Schools have to remember that it plays a limited but very important role, and properly understand that. The problem is not the need for an add-on notion of character formation, of the word of the week, of a notion of coming up with a really baseline discussion of issues having to do with values; this is a problem throughout the curriculum. Character is everywhere, it's taught through every different field, every

different class; but it's also taught merely in the relationship between teacher and student, between parent and child: it's everywhere around us.

So my point is: We can't overemphasize a silver bullet solution and we can't put so much emphasis on it that it misunderstands the larger question. If we look back in history, the American Founding Fathers – which is my field of history – George Washington didn't need values clarification. The greatest generation didn't need character education as a method. And I think, after 9/11, the American people don't really need a new course on how to think about these things. What we need is a general shift in education in how we approach all of these issues. I think trying to do it through a particular methodology or pedagogy, especially given my earlier criticisms, is dubious.

MS. BERRETH: Okay, Matthew.

MR. SPALDING: I'm happy to have a conversation and be convinced otherwise, but I would like to raise those problems.

MS. BERRETH: (Chuckles) Okay. Let's pick up a piece of that, and we will see what Matthew is convinced of or is not. I would like to pick up the issue of soft and hard values, or as Matthew called them "hard virtues," because this is a current issue in the field. An example of what some people consider the soft values would be caring, and there is a whole school of thought in character education that there is too little attention paid to caring, to empathy, to those values that are considered on the soft side.

On the other hand, there is an equally vociferous school that says that we don't pay enough attention to the hard values, the hard virtues. Persistence would be an example; punctuality is a minor one, but it's important in schools, so that's often listed on that side of the calendar. (Laughter.) Some people would put honesty over there; I think that's an interesting question. Marvin and Linda, tell Matthew what you think: Do you think that soft values are overemphasized to a loss of focus on the so-called hard values in our schools?

MR. BERKOWITZ: Do you want to go first or do you want me to go first?

MS. MCKAY: I don't care, you want to go first?

MR. BERKOWITZ: I will go first. I do a lot of training in schools, with teachers and principals and so on, and a lot of schools have the words on the wall, and I'm not an advocate of words on the wall. It's fine as a way to make more salient the real agenda of the school, but the words on the wall are not going to change anybody or do anything. But I ask them, "How many of you have courage on your list?" Oh, Courage; hands go up. "And how about diligence?" And, oh, their hands go up. And few of them will have punctuality, but you could add that in there, too. "I assume all of your schools are heavily interested in promoting intelligence." Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I say, "Good. So you want courage and you want persistence, how about loyalty?" Oh, we got loyalty, that's a great one. And intelligence.

Congratulations, you've just described the 9/11 terrorists. In essence, they were intelligent, they were punctual, they were loyal, they were courageous, they outsmarted us, they were brave, and so on down the line. I'm not denigrating those; I think those are good things. But those are derivative values, derivative goods. Loyalty is good only insofar as what one is loyal to. Persistence is only good insofar as what one persists toward. This suggests there needs to be a superordinate set of values, such as justice and compassion and so on. You can call those soft, you can call them hard, whatever you want; but philosophically, they have to be superordinate because the others are derivative.

MS. BERRETH: And, Marvin, what do you see in the schools?

MR. BERKOWITZ: What do I see them doing, you mean?

MS. BERRETH: Right, in terms of the values that are being emphasized in practice?

MR. BERKOWITZ: There is a huge range of what they're doing. The good schools are trying to promote all of that. They're trying to promote the whole set of it, and they're promoting it by building relationships; by modeling it, adults modeling it; by having a culture in which the policies and practices resonate with and reinforce the values they're talking about. But it runs the gamut. Within St. Louis and all across the country you see a huge range. You see schools doing it in an enlightened and excellent way, and you see schools doing it in a way that's utterly superficial.

I got the newsletter from the principal at my son's middle school. It said that they're very proud of their character education program. Yes, I accidentally got my kid into a school that has character education. So I said to my son – he's in about sixth or seventh grade – “Danny, I hear you have character education in your school.” And he said, “I don't think so.” (Laughter.) And I said, “Well, we got the newsletter from your principal and it says you have this word of the month program and all this stuff.” And he thought for a moment and he said, “Oh, that.” And I said, “Well, what is it?” And he said, “Once a month, the principal comes on and reads us a quote about the word of the month.” And I thought, Hallelujah! My son has been saved.

I picture some kid walking around this school about to go Columbine, and suddenly the principal comes on and reads a quote, and this kid feels like the psychic weight has lifted from him, and he's been saved. Of course, as the month goes on, it wears off and he needs another fix, and he's about to go Columbine again. But fortunately, another quote comes on, and he's saved again. You know, I thought, this is ridiculous – (laughter) – that's not going to change a kid. You have got the whole range there.

MS. BERRETH: And, Linda, how do you see that? You have spent a lot of time in schools.

MS. MCKAY: Right.

MS. BERRETH: Is it the whole range? Do you think, as Matthew suggests or suspects, that it's the soft values that dominate in the schools today?

MS. MCKAY: First of all, I think what Matthew described as building character and how it should be done in schools is what character education is, if it's done correctly. And I think that's probably one of the main things we need to work on, is get an understanding of what character education is.

When we started in the '80s, I can honestly say, it was a question whether we could even get one word defined with one definition. That's where we were in the '80s, when we were working in public schools. One district in St. Louis that I worked with finally decided, building by building, that they would decide with parent involvement the definitions, which is where the controversy would come in. Take honesty for example. Honesty is hard to define sometimes, believe it or not, when you get into it. That is where we started.

Where are we now? It's what Matthew said: It has to be integrated into literature, when you read literature; it has to be that teaching moment; it has to be how you operate the school; it has to be the hard values with the soft values. Whatever they're called, there has to be that combination for children to understand what these values and character traits mean in their lives. What Marvin said about the word of the month is completely right: It cannot be word of the month. It has to be how the teacher teaches, how the principal leads the building, how the parents are involved. And it has to be student leadership. Student leaders are coming forth, and they're part of the group in the district that's developing the character education process.

So I find a combination of all the values starting to emerge very much across the country. Last year, the department gave 39 grants in character education and they had to be based on evidenced, scientific-based character education models. But the legislation very much describes that it has to deal with the life of the school building: how that building is operated, the leadership of the building, the training of the teachers, parent involvement. And student perspective was added this last time, which I think is wonderful.

MS. BERRETH: Let's just push this a little further. There is a school of criticism that says schools, by their nature, are oppressive, that they support compliance and passivity in students, much opposed to the kind of moral courage that Marvin has talked about, for students and for teachers. Is that the case?

MR. BERKOWITZ: Yes. (Laughter.) But they don't have to be that way.

MS. BERRETH: Okay.

MR. BERKOWITZ: I did my post-doc with Larry Colberg many years ago, and he did his first work in school in reform – cultural reform – in two institutions, two types of institutions: high schools and adult prisons, because they were so analogous. The structures were the same. They're oppressive hierarchical systems in which those on the bottom basically have no voice.

We know that empowerment and voice, particularly in this great experiment of democracy we have been talking about, is critical. How do you shape citizens in a democracy? We're a democracy in which people are abstaining. Why are they abstaining? Because they are raised in hierarchical, authoritarian families and hierarchical, authoritarian schools. They never have any voice. They have no experience of what it's like to have any voice in a democratic forum. And then we say, Go out there and vote.

MS. BERRETH: Matthew?

MR. SPALDING: But here's the problem. You can't treat all education like liberal education. You don't teach character by approaching it in the kind of philosophical way a college class would sit around and talk about ethics. Teaching character demands what we might call hierarchy and authority. It's character formation; it's not democratic in that sense. And this is the nature of the problem.

My criticism of soft values is twofold. One, it's very practical. On the one hand, it seems to me that it always falls into the lowest common denominator. Now, it's not that I'm opposed to honesty and caring and things like that, but the lowest common denominator tends to be these soft values. I'm not against them, but that's not, in my opinion, what's going to build character; it takes something more than that.

But the second is a philosophical problem. This is Rousseau versus Aristotle. Modern liberal secularism rejected the Aristotelian traditions of character and ethics a long time ago. All right. That's what the Social Gospel movement is about, Walter Rauschenbusch, John Dewey, progressivism. It takes a different philosophical view of all that. That is a deep, root problem in the question of how do you teach character. If our discussion about how to bring character into the school is still based on that philosophical assumption, you have got a problem; and I think we need to face that larger issue.

MS. BERRETH: I want to extend Matthew's comment to another issue that all three of you have touched on. I do it partly because we are at the intersection of religion and character education here, and we have been leaning on the character education piece. At least two of you addressed the concept of universal moral values. You claimed that consensus could be obtained on those. Really? (Laughter.) In particular, to what extent do you think those universal moral values can be taught outside of a religious framework? Linda? (Laughter.)

MS. MCKAY: All I can do is speak from experience. I have been to over 30 states, either learning about or working in what we call character education, and one of the key things we discuss is, What can we agree on and what does it mean? I think that's the second question you have to ask on universal values. We can say, "Oh, of course I believe in being respectful/responsible." But what does it mean? What's that definition? And time and again, I have yet to leave a meeting where we finally didn't agree on a starting point that would have helped make our world better.

I think because we are so determined that we have to define it down to the last bit, or that we can't offend anybody, we, as a society, quit about 35 years ago. We started about that long ago backing away from defining what we call hard values, the hard character traits.

So, yes, I do think it can be done, because I have watched it be done for so long. But the step that goes with it after you define the word is, What does it mean? Okay, if I believe this, what are my actions going to be?

I have not been in the Far East doing this; I haven't had that experience. But what I'm saying, as a world, we have got to do that and find what we can agree on and what actions could we have that would be for the betterment of all of us in living together, and start working our way through that.

MS. BERRETH: Matthew, do you think that universal moral values can be taught in a secular framework?

MR. SPALDING: There are a lot of aspects to that question. Let me take the question of the universal moral values first. I think that there are universal principles and virtues. I think that trying to find them by making sure everyone in the universe agrees with them is the wrong way to go. Unless it can be universalized, it's not true – I think that is the wrong way to go.

The old notion of virtue was grounded in a concept of human nature. Human nature was understood to be universal. That came out of philosophy and that also came out of the revelatory tradition of religion. And they agreed on that consensus, and that was essentially what the Western philosophical tradition was all about. The problem is that the Enlightenment and liberalism that came out of that largely, although not completely, rejected that in favor of values.

Virtues became replaced with values – Max Weber, in German philosophy. Values, inherently, are not grounded in anything, so you're searching for these places to ground it. And I think trying to take a vote, if you will, it's not what you're trying to do, but it's this notion of trying to find the greatest number who can agree with you, and that is getting further away from the moorings in any philosophical, religious or other tradition of thought. So my answer is yes, there are universals, but talking about it in terms of universal values the way I think it is being presented here as a possible option, I think, is the wrong way to go.

MS. BERRETH: Okay Marvin?

MR. BERKOWITZ: Ooh. (Laughter.) A couple of things. There was a wonderful little philosophy book by G. Spencer Brown years ago called *The Laws of Form*. He begins it by saying, “Draw a line.” And the point is that we begin knowing through dichotomies, but we must move past dichotomies to really understand the complexity of the world. And Rousseau versus Aristotle, Weber versus Aristotle, values versus virtue – if you’re going to keep sticking with this notion you’ll oversimplify the world that way. We are much more complex than that, the world is much more complex than that; that’s just one piece.

It’s a matter of faith for me. (Chuckles.) It’s faith that there are universals, because if there aren’t universals, I think everything ultimately slides down the slippery slope to relativism. One way or another, that’s where you end up. And I can’t believe that there is no answer to the question of, Is this more right than something else? Whether we have found it yet or not, I don’t know.

There have been 2,000 years or more of philosophy in the Western world and we still don’t have a full consensus. But we have some decent handles on it and different ways of thinking about this. Yes, I believe and I feel there are universals out there, but I would be very cautious about saying that a Western world enterprise has found the universals. There are lots of other perspectives in the world than just that which has happened in the Western world. If it’s truly universal – no, practically we can’t go and ask every single citizen in the world.

But what I tell schools is exactly what you said, which is it can’t be a community. You can’t use Etzioni’s notions of communitarianism. And I have had this debate with him, and I actually co-wrote his first paper on character ed, and we disagreed vehemently, which was not surprising. What we need to do is try to get community consensus and then apply philosophical scrutiny. Whether we use an Aristotelian virtues notion or another notion, that’s still something we have to grapple with because we haven’t gotten all the way there yet. But I’m not willing to say that Aristotle was all right and Kant was all wrong. I think they each have a piece of the elephant at this point, and we need the human enterprise to keep grappling and moving forward as we struggle to find the way to substantiate what are the universals are. But without universals, I think we’re in deep trouble.

MS. BERRETH: Okay. And there are people in this audience who have to grapple daily, because there are educators sitting in this room. I have so many more questions that I want to ask, but it’s only fair to share. (Laughter.) So I’m going to open the floor. There is a mic. I would like you to stand up if you have a question and state your name and your question. I’m going to start with the gentleman in the very back row there.

KENT GREENWALT: Kent Greenwalt. My question is directed at Marvin and the thing you said about bravery and loyalty and so on; and then you went up to the higher level of values and said justice. Now, of course, the 9/11 people thought they were acting in a way that was redressing an injustice as well. My sense is that something like loyalty and bravery, although they can be done for bad causes, if they're done from neutral things we do think they're positively good. Justice, it seems to me, is very open-ended as to how you fill it in, and one person's idea of justice is another person's idea of injustice. And I think that raises the question as to how much teaching of values one can do without filling in what's just or unjust; and, of course, the society disagrees about that.

MR. BERKOWITZ: (Chuckles.) Good question. I'm a psychologist; that's my training. And so my first thought was that I don't believe, just because somebody claims he or she understands something why he or she does something, that it's right. If somebody says, "The just thing for me to do is to kill everybody in the room not wearing glasses because I'm wearing glasses," that doesn't make it just, just because I decided so myself. So that's a piece of that.

Again, we need to have some sort of an enlightened sense – and I'm not a philosopher; I need help from the philosophers on this one – of what has passed some philosophical scrutiny as to what stands for justice. And once we have those kind of criteria, and whether it's a Kantian notion or a Rawlsian notion or, you know, virtues of notion or whatever notion it happens to be, at least there has been some strong scrutiny, with standards and discipline, to try to figure that out. That's the best I can do in talking about why justice doesn't have the same characteristic as what I call the derivative goods.

MS. BERRETH: Okay. Matthew, do you want to respond?

MR. SPALDING: Well, no, I agree with that point. There is a debate over the nature of justice, and I agree that the debate is this debate between Kant and Aristotle. My problem is we're not having that debate. That debate occurs in some very small places here and there between philosophy professors, and perhaps in some other schools that take natural law traditions seriously; but, generally speaking, we're not having that debate.

But that's not the debate by which you teach character to the grade school kids. You teach them by showing them examples. Can we at least agree on whether this example or this story tells us something about justice? Raises the right questions? Makes them think about it? I think one of the things we need to do is make distinctions between types of education appropriate to different levels and things like that, which I think is being done but sometimes gets missed in the picture.

MS. BERRETH: And it does tend to fade away in a lot of secondary schools. Yes, Linda? Then we will go to a question from Evelyn.

MS. MCKAY: Taking it into the classroom, again, that's really where I come from. What I do see, especially at the elementary level, is not a conversation on justice, but I see one on fairness. That's definitely what I see most at the elementary level.

In your comment about looking at the people of September 11th who were able to do what they did, I do think that one of the things I see starting to emerge in schools around this issue is this: You take a situation in literature, and you say, "The character traits of the hero, the character traits of the villain, what were they?" They often come out the same. Okay, what made the hero the hero?

The example I used about honesty and about hard questions that young children will ask comes from an elementary school. One time, a young girl, talking about the word of honesty, asked, "If the policeman were your door and you were hiding Anne Frank, would you let the policeman in?" She didn't use the word Gestapo. Now, that was definitely a teachable moment. And that was a young person looking at depth, and taking the word honesty and really having some dialogue around honesty. So I see it starting to happen in schools, maybe not via the word justice, but young children will definitely talk about fairness; getting to middle and high school, I see it moving into justice more.

MS. BERRETH: Okay. Next question, Evelyn?

EVELYN HOLMAN: Evelyn Holman. The question is for Linda. Linda, you talked about giving your grants based on scientific evidence or principles. Can you define that, and also give us some example?

MS. BERRETH: This would make another good panel. (Laughter.)

MS. MCKAY: Yes. These were the first grants out of the Department of Education given based on scientific evidence, and, wouldn't you know it, they were for character education.

You had to have either a random sampling where you could really say, quote, "We have schools that aren't involved in this." Or you had to have control schools where you were really looking at a very defined, intentional process that was put in place for character education so that you could go and you could show the intervention, what it was, the training, the ongoing training – that you had a very defined process for how you were going to go about the evaluation. And most of the ones who had a parent survey, a student survey, a teacher survey, staff surveys, those are the ones I see in most of the grants I have looked at. The other piece was that you had to have outside observations coming in, then, to correlate with the self-reporting. That's what I see for those grants. (Cross talk.)

MS. BERRETH: Okay, a question up here. Yes, this woman in the black shirt.

MARY ELLEN SIKES: Mary Ellen Sikes, Institute for Humanist Studies. I'd like to ask the panel to explore the concept of community investment in the values of the school. Let me give two potential examples. One might be a situation where respect and caring are being taught in the classroom, but perhaps the family has beliefs that are racist, maybe even tied in with their religious beliefs. Another might be an example of – which actually happened in my community – a badly applied character education program that denigrated students and unfairly punished them for minor infractions, totally out of proportion, and parents' complaints were not really taken seriously. So, two different directions. We have talked about the role of students and the role of the administrators and teachers. What's the role of the community and parents in this process?

MS. BERRETH: Okay, panel? Linda, do you want to start and then Marvin, or vice – either is fine.

MS. MCKAY: I don't see it consistent across the country, but what I see emerging more and more is parents are definitely part of the building design/building implementation for character education; and students are at the table also. Sometimes I have seen it start internally in a building, with the staff and the principals going out to the community. Other times, I have seen huge community participation, up to 100, 200 people coming together. So it's not consistent. What the legislation says is parent and student perspective must be taken into account, and coming from the field for the last 15 years, I know that is definitely what works the very best.

And in answer to your question, I did have a personal experience once at an elementary school when a parent called regarding respect: The parents did not want their child to respect someone who was homosexual. The phone was dropping out of my hand when I got the call. The school and the other parents came right back in and said, "In this school, this is how we need to respect each other; this is how we need to treat each other. Is there anything about this you don't agree with?"

I think inviting people who are coming to the table like that to be part of it is a critical step, because it takes building that understanding, that trust, that knowledge. Does that answer it?

MS. BERRETH: Okay, Marvin?

MR. BERKOWITZ: I agree very much with what Linda said. On the first hand, yes, ideally you want not just parents but all stakeholders, all who know the school and have a vested interest. And what if the kids in the school are antisocial, violent, and criminal or good and productive members of our community. You can list a lot of different stakeholder groups. The parents are one of them, and they're the primary one, clearly; but ideally, you want all stakeholders involved in this. That's not a tough one.

The other one is more interesting because the version I almost always hear in schools is: What about these kids who are going home to families or communities that give the opposite message that we're giving? And my answer is the following. I say, "In

every one of your schools, you have kids I call the golden children. It's as if somebody took the child and dipped them in a vat of gold. They look like a little Oscar statue; they glisten in the sun. They come in and they smile at you and they really have a thirst for knowledge and they volunteer, and so on." And teachers gravitate to the golden children, these glistening, shining little statuettes out there. And I tell the teachers, "I have a revelation for you: These kids don't need you. They're going to be just fine even if you're a crappy teacher. Even if this school doesn't do good character education, these kids are going to be okay. Who needs you? It's the kids who are not getting this anywhere else. So you really need to think of those of the kids who need it most from you."

Kids can be bilingual, kids can be bicultural. All those of you who are in schools have kids who are bilingual or bicultural. They could learn that we do it this way here and the other way elsewhere, they can learn that. And so you give them the greater vision, the vision of a better way to be in your school, because in some senses, at least you're the only possible antidote to what they're getting at home and in community.

MS. BERRETH: I want to comment on Marvin's comment, and then we will go to Rebecca. For years I have thought about a group I sat in many years ago, when a second-grade teacher relayed a story and asked what should have been done. In the class group sharing, one of the little boys shared that he had a new bike. His dad had driven around the neighborhood the night before in a pickup until he found one, with the kid with him, and he put that bike in the back of the truck. And so, the kid was thrilled to share about that at school. And the teacher is probably still puzzling over it. (Laughter.) But you have spoken to it, in part, by addressing what our values are in school – a shared set of values – as opposed to what they may be in the broader community.

MR. BERKOWITZ: But I didn't advocate the teacher denigrating the father. I didn't have to give that one.

MS. BERRETH: That's right. Nor did this teacher. Rebecca, you're next.

REBECCA HAYES: Rebecca Hayes, Mary Washington College. I would respectfully disagree with that position about the golden children because perhaps some of those became Enron executives. (Laughter.)

MR. BERKOWITZ: I doubt it highly. Golden doesn't mean smart.

MS. HAYES: My point is that there is something of value in the common hammering out of a dialogue about these values for all kinds of children, whether they are children of benefit and plenty or children who we might perceive as deprived. And I think the public forum of the school has great value in that way.

MS. BERRETH: Okay, thank you, Rebecca. Warren, you have had your hand up for a long time.

WARREN NORD: Warren Nord. I want to follow up on Kent's question of a minute ago. It seems to me you have all defined the problem in terms of character education. You disagree a little bit about whether character education works or is effective, but it seems to me that's only half of what moral education is. You haven't talked about justice very much, you haven't talked about homophobia, you haven't talked about sexism, you haven't talked about class consciousness, you haven't talked about consumer society, you haven't talked about problems between the First and the Third World. Why? Well, all of those things are controversial; we disagree deeply about them. What does it mean to be morally educated with regard to those profoundly important moral questions?

MS. BERRETH: Okay, I'm going to start with Matthew and ask each of them to address your question, Warren, do you have one more thing you wanted to say about it?

MR. NORD: Just very quickly: When we have to deal with deeply disagreeing points of view, the idea of education, of liberal education, comes into play. When we talk about the kinds of things you have been talking about, that's largely a matter of training and socialization. That's not a sharp, a hard and fast dichotomy; there are degrees of difference. But by and large, what's usually considered character education, I think, should better be called character socialization or character training, because it doesn't deal with those deeply divisive issues or, indeed, the foundations of our fundamental values.

MS. BERRETH: Warren made this case in the book, too. I didn't really agree with him, but he says it isn't happening. So let's ask each panelist to discuss why schools are not dealing with the deeply divisive issues.

MR. SPALDING: I will give you an answer; I'm not sure this will be the answer everyone wants to hear. But I agree with the distinction you made between moral education and liberal education. It's one thing to approach it from the point of view of liberal education, where you're sitting around a table, talking about the various views on abortion and controversial questions.

When I'm talking about character education, I think the emphasis is on a much younger child. And, at that age, and in the public schools as they currently exist, I don't think they should be dealing with those controversial issues as controversial issues. If they come up in the school in a way that is either disruptive or causes a problem or things like that, then, obviously, that's something you have to deal with. But I don't think they should take it upon themselves as a role, to be the institution in American society that shapes, as a matter of character formation, how a student thinks their way through these questions. That's not the role of the school. I think that's the role of the family, the community and the church.

MS. BERRETH: Thank you, Matthew. Linda?

MS. MCKAY: I guess I would make two comments. I do see schools taking on some of these hard issues, but I think it goes to the phrase, “You have got to crawl before you can walk.” I think that’s where we were, as a country, with public schools, where there is a comfort level to even try that.

I think it’s developmental, both in starting to say, What do we mean by character education process in our school? What’s it going to be like? Even that thinking process and then implementing a process, and then it has to grow, it has to be nurtured. Where I see that in place, though, is in middle schools and high schools, I see students and faculty having such courage to take on these issues that these kids are dealing with.

I think that’s the main thing, if we leave with anything today: Values and character development happen 24 hours a day, so we as a community have to look at, what we are doing 24 hours a day.

(Audio break) – the schools have got to have the courage to come together and at least start giving some virtues, some hard values, to our young children, and providing a context so they can struggle with these hard issues.

One quick example: In St. Louis, about three years ago, high school students had seminars at a university, and they dealt with very hard issues. They brought in people from the field to talk to the students about these issues. They were dealing with sexual harassment, they were dealing with teenage pregnancy. They asked what they could do, because the students decided this was an issue that had to be dealt with.

So I think it can happen when it’s at the right development stage and trust has been developed. I go back to that trust, that wisdom, that commitment in a community, and what I see are teachers and parents not backing away from joining with young people to do this.

MS. BERRETH: Marvin?

MR. BERKOWITZ: First of all, regarding Warren’s notion that it’s socialization rather than education because we’re not dealing with the difficult issues: By your definition, we’re actually engaging in algebra socialization and history socialization, and when we’re teaching kids the multiplication tables, that must be socialization, too, because those are not difficult, contentious issues. So I don’t think the definition works very well, to begin with.

Secondly, for Matthew: Yes, certainly younger children may be the more common place we do this. But before I came to the University of Missouri-St. Louis, I was the Ambassador Holland H Coors Professor of Character Development at the United States Air Force Academy. West Point and Annapolis and the Coast Guard all do the same thing. A lot of other universities do the same kind of thing. I have colleagues who work at professional schools, law schools, medical schools, dental schools. So we’re not just talking about this in the lower grades.

MR. SPALDING: I'm just saying, those are very, very different things, when it comes to education.

MR. BERKOWITZ: I agree, but –

MR. SPALDING: We should have that very clearly in our mind.

MR. BERKOWITZ: It's more a matter of degree than it is categorical, though. Young kids can grapple with some difficult issues in the right way. They certainly, as Linda has said, are deeply concerned about issues of fairness. Even, as you will see, three- and four-year-old children will argue deeply about issues of fairness and so on, and can grapple with that idea.

Finally, in response to Linda: Yes, we need to walk before we – wait, no, we need to crawl before we walk. (Laughter.) Got it. But, we walk before we crawl because back in the '70s and so on, the way we used to do this was by bringing in controversial issues and having high school debates about these and the moral dilemma discussions and so on. So, we actually walked, then we crawled, now we're walking again; it goes back and forth. I also recommend a really nice little quick history, a book by McClellan, from Teachers College Press, called *Moral Education in America: Schools and the Shaping of Character from Colonial Times to the Present*.

MS. BERRETH: Okay.

MR. BERKOWITZ: Many of us think it's a new phenomenon, but it's not; it just changes.

MS. BERRETH: We have time for two questions and I get to ask one of them, so I'm picking this woman up here to ask the other and we will look for a quick response from the panel.

MYNGA FUTRELL: Hi, Mynga Futrell, Objectivity, Accuracy, and Balance in Teaching About Religion. The American people as a whole, most polls have shown, feel rather strongly that there is a relationship between religion and moral education. Most people think one must have some religion to be moral. Yet we are talking about getting a community together, getting all the stakeholders involved in establishing agreed-upon common values. And Marvin, yesterday, talked about the concept of students' voices, and now we talk parents' voices, community voices. When you are in a society in which it is thought that religion is a source of values, whether that is true or not, and in which it's kind of hard for nonreligious people to get elected to office. It's kind of – we know how religion plays out in politics. How do you get the voice when there are going to be a lot of bashful people?

MS. BERRETH: Okay. We're going to get one response.

MR. SPALDING: Which voice? Which voice?

MS. FUTRELL: The voice of the nonreligious who are in this community: the parents, the student in the classroom, and that kind of thing. How do we get in on establishing agreed-upon virtues, if I may use Matthew's term?

MS. BERRETH: Okay. Who is going to respond?

MS. MCKAY: To clarify, the nonreligious voice?

MS. BERRETH: Nonreligious voice, how do we engage the nonreligious voice from the community and of students in this process?

MR. SPALDING: I believe that religion is the most important source of morality, all right? (Laughter.) But, having said that, when it comes to teaching in the school, that's not, in my opinion, the way to do it.

I see this, on the one hand as a great advantage to this discussion of moral character. For one thing, you don't have an Establishment problem when you're talking about character; let's just talk about character and virtues. But the other thing is that, if you look at the discussion of virtue historically, Thomas Aquinas read Aristotle, who was a pagan. The conversation today in modern moral philosophy has lots that is not grounded ultimately in religion. Religion, nature and philosophy are all sources for character and virtues.

So, on the one hand, I still remain dubious; but, having said that, I think this is probably one of the most fruitful conversations that's going on, precisely because there is a ground upon which you can have the traditions of religion and philosophy and natural law agree with non-religion, other religions, in a much larger way than you can when you get into the specifics and the controversies in the Constitution involved with religion itself.

MS. BERRETH: And I will also say that, for the three of us who are associated with the Character Education Partnership, we have documents that talk about community engagement and speak specifically to diverse voices and how you go about identifying and engaging them.

Okay, we are down to our last few minutes. Folks, I'm going to ask you each to respond to this question. A few years ago, the American Federation of Teachers put out a book called *Teaching Reading IS Rocket Science*. And I'm going to ask you whether teaching character education is rocket science in a country that is widely perceived as the most secular, and, as Jon pointed out to us the first evening, is less well known as perhaps the most religious and perhaps the most religiously diverse. So, is teaching character education in our country rocket science, and why?

MR. BERKOWITZ: Indubitably.

MS. BERRETH: Quickly.

MR. BERKOWITZ: It's interesting: That's one of my big slides. I actually got Captain Elvin Lee, United States Air Force, to get me a picture of a rocket so I could put it in the background of my slide. It says, Character education is rocket science.

MS. BERRETH: Marvin, I didn't know I had set you up.

MR. BERKOWITZ: (Chuckles.) Yeah. I'm probably going to disagree with others here, but I do an awful lot of staff development, and sometimes I will spend a year or two with people. And we run leadership academies for principals, we accept 60 a year, and I would say probably at the end of that we get 10 to 15, maybe 20 max, who really get it after a full year of bringing in experts for full-day workshops, giving them readings, having them write assignments and giving them feedback on the assignments.

This stuff is deep and complex. It's comprehensive school reform. It's learning how to get people to buy in, to join you, to empower all the voices. It's learning how to completely transform your pedagogy so that it resonates with, manifests and supports the kind of virtues that Matthew was talking about, the kinds of issues we're all talking about. It's not easy.

MS. BERRETH: But isn't it also a reflection on your own values?

MR. BERKOWITZ: Of course.

MS. BERRETH: I think that piece is often missed in professional development.

MR. BERKOWITZ: The teacher you are is who you are, and your values. One thing I learned with teachers is that – and it took me a while, because I'm dense – rhetoric far outpaces practice. I can teach them and I listen to them and hear them talk to others, and I believed it. I hear them talk about how to create a caring classroom community, how to run class meetings in an empowering way, and I would say, "They got it, by George, they got it! It's wonderful!" And then I go into their classrooms and observe them, and I was crestfallen, because they had it on the level of rhetoric and not the level of practice, and that's another part of the rocket science piece.

MS. BERRETH: Matthew, and then we will finish with Linda.

MR. SPALDING: For the modern academy and liberal secularism, it's rocket science. They have so much baggage that they bring into this equation, I think they have a very difficult time discussing this.

MS. BERRETH: And what's the baggage they're bringing?

MR. SPALDING: The philosophical, political, intellectual trends over the 20th century having to do with questions of character, morality, and religion. They come into

it with all of that. So, for those, it's very hard. I find it interesting, the fact that on the other hand, for the average mom and dad, or the person walking down the street, it's not rocket science; it's pretty obvious and self-evident. And I think that's what's interesting about what happened after September 11th. The academy had a very difficult time grappling with what had happened, but most people got it right away.

MS. BERRETH: Interesting. You know, most schoolteachers are moms and dads, typical citizens.

MR. SPALDING: But, unfortunately, they have gone to schools of education. (Laughter.)

MS. BERRETH: Ah, so that's changed them. (Laughter.) Linda?

MS. MCKAY: Oh, thanks. (Laughter.) I guess I have more faith. And I guess what I have faith in goes back to our country and how I think we struggle with being able to respect everyone but deal with those hard issues if we really set our mind to it. I think that's what we are about in character education. And yes, I do think it is more difficult even than rocket science.

The academy Marvin talked about for principals, I was part of establishing that in St. Louis. Do you know why we established it? Because our school district principals and our teachers told us they needed it. They said, "We have to do this, but we need to better understand how to do this, how to do this in the public arena, and be able to talk about these hard issues, to be able to talk about religion in our schools and not back away from it. We need help right now; we need training."

So it definitely, as we move into this, is going to take training, and it's going to take reflection, because that's when understanding comes, that's when courage comes. And the results I see in schools are so worth it. The young people, right now, I think really need us to do this.

MS. BERRETH: Okay, thank you, Linda. We were asked to look at the relationship between religion and moral education in the public schools and the challenges and opportunities. I want to thank our panel for having done such a great job of that. I thank the audience, as well, for your participation. Let's give them a hand.

(Applause.)