Abstract *(Document Summary)*
Benninga and Wynne contend that the positive outcomes of for-character education counter such misleading pictures as the one sketched by Alfie Kohn in his Feb 1997 article in "Phi Delta Kappan." Copyright Phi Delta Kappa Feb 1998

Keeping in character: A time-tested solution

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IN THE February 1997 Kappan, Alfie Kohn attacked modern character education for a myriad of alleged deficiencies. This essay constitutes our response to his criticisms. The basic structure of true "for-character" education relies on an approach that

- is relevant for students of all ages;
- has been time-tested and refined over 2,500 years;
- is as responsive to today's children as it was to yesterday's;
- has broad support among American citizens, including teachers and students; and
- has a research base to justify its continuation.

Increasing Disorder

Before we turn to particulars, it is important for readers to understand exactly why we and so many other American adults are worried about the character of the nation's youth. It is not, as Kohn implies, because we dislike young people. Instead, it is because we love them and want them to stop killing and abusing themselves and one another at record rates.

Statistics document the record-breaking rates of distress afflicting young Americans and form an essential backdrop for any discussion of for-character practices. The annual rates of death of young (15- to 19-year-old) white males by homicide and suicide are at their highest points since national recordkeeping began in 1914.[1] The rates of out-of-wedlock births to young (15- to 19-year-old) white females are also at or near their highest points since national record-keeping began in 1936. What's more, these high rates have occurred during an era of generally more accessible contraception, abortion, and sex education. All these indicators focus on whites -

members of our most advantaged group. This suggests that the "causes" for the bulk of the disorder only incidentally involve poverty and race.

As if we needed any more bad news, the Centers for Disease Control released an important report in February 1997. That report found that "nearly three-quarters of all the murders of children in the industrialized world occur in the United States" and that the U.S. has the "highest rates of childhood homicide, suicide, and firearms-related deaths of any of the world's 26 richest nations."[2]

All these relatively precise measures of disorder indirectly measure many other uncountable forms of profound despair, injury, and wrongdoing that affect the young.

- Most murders of young persons are committed by young murderers.
- Every identified young death by homicide undoubtedly subsumes many other less violent crimes, such as battery, woundings, and beatings.
- Out-of-wedlock births are also indices of victimization of vulnerable females by males or of risky acts of promiscuity.
- The suicides are also indicators of previously attempted suicides and other symptoms of deep depression.

High school students themselves are very well situated to see what is happening among their peers. They clearly recognize that many deeply flawed contemporary education policies have enmeshed our young in a disorderly, low-demand world - a world in which too many adults confuse being caring with being permissive. Recent evidence from a national sample of high school students shows that 50% of the respondents said that "schools fail to challenge pupils to do their best," 71% said that there were "too many disruptive students," 79% said that learning would improve if "schools ensured students got their work done on time and completed their assignments," 86% said that schools should teach students the value of "hard work," 71% would require after-school classes for students who get D's and F's in major subjects, 73% said that requiring exit tests before graduation would cause students to learn more, and 50% said that "too many students get away with being late to class or not doing their work."[3] As we will show, these student opinions are quite congruent with the for-character approach.

Some Qualifications

We have both done considerable research and writing on issues involving student character. For instance, each of us, acting separately and with the help of local educators, has organized school recognition programs, one in the Chicago area and the other in the Fresno area. These programs identify elementary and secondary schools that maintain exemplary character formation policies and curricula. Over 13 yearly cycles, approximately 400 elementary, middle, and secondary schools have participated in these programs. Thus we have examined a variety of good, bad, and indifferent for-character activities. From that base, after some important background information, we will assess Kohn's key contentions.

One other qualification should be expressed. Many of Kohn's criticisms are essentially aimed at the ambitious claims made for packaged character education curricula. We and many leading

figures in the character education movement are not sanguine about expecting notable results from any such quick-fix approach.[4] However, well-conceived packages may be useful if they are part of a holistic school- or classroom-wide for-character approach. Indeed, it is to express our distance from quick-fix activities that we use the phrase "for-character education" rather than the more common "character education." Such use stresses the need to integrate for-character elements into many typical school activities. Thus there can be for-character policies, for-character co-curricular activities, and even for-character lunchroom policies. To further stress the issue of systematically planning for-character activities, one of the authors even published a list of 100 for-character activities that can be used in and around schools.[5] Though 100 is not a sacred number, the point is that any for character school or classroom will include a number of for-character activities, most of which will be integrated into its day-to-day operations.

Character and For-Character Education

The word character derives from the Greek word "to mark" or "to engrave" and is associated with the writings of philosophers such as Plato and Aristotle. People with good character habitually display good behavior, and these people are known by their behavior. Thus a generous person may be seen giving notable gifts, or a brave person may perform heroic acts. A courteous person behaves properly and with civility toward others.

There may be no specific consensus on a list of desirable character traits or habits. But considerable agreement exists on the desirable virtues -- moral qualities regarded as good or meritorious - that underlie these traits. Throughout history thoughtful philosophers and educators have been concerned about the cultivation of such virtues as honesty, kindness, courage, perseverance, and loyalty and about the cultivation of their concomitant traits. The renewed interest in such virtues is evident in the huge success of The Book of Virtues, by William Bennett. The book is a collection of inspiring classic literature for children and adults. It addresses 10 particular virtues. In recent years, we have also witnessed the publication of a spate of nonsectarian character-oriented books by psychologists, educators, and distinguished scholars.[6]

The consensus is that traits - and, to some degree, virtues - are not innate. They must be acquired through learning and practice in homes, schools, neighborhoods, churches, and other agencies. They must be transmitted to be internalized. However, a child's state of mind is relevant to this process. That is, for-character educators do not advocate having children behave solely according to a set of principles or rules without understanding them. Rather, for-character educators agree with William Frankena, who proposed that "we regard the morality of principles and the morality of traits of character, or being and doing, not as rival kinds of morality between which we must choose, but as two complimentary aspects of the same morality."[7]

The character tradition stresses the importance of whole environments operating systematically to foster good character formation. But environments mean not only the physical elements surrounding students, but also the people surrounding them, the good or bad examples they provide, and the expectations they establish. Profound character education involves managing classrooms or whole schools so that they will advance student character.

Here is where Alfie Kohn missed the mark. His criticisms extend far beyond the defects of relying solely on packages. He takes offense because for-character educators have developed a perspective, a "particular style of moral training." And it is true that there are good and bad ways to teach character. Kohn then proposes his alternative to character education. Let us, in his words, get straight to the educational point. His alternative is a set of various approaches that we have met before, collected under the umbrella of developmental education. The umbrella currently includes such panaceas as the whole-language approach, constructivism, and, most recently, democratic education. These approaches have already been tried in our own era, without generating either "good people" or notable academic learning.[8]

True, the policies have attractive labels. But such labels are deceptive. Who, for example, could be against democratic education? Yet such ambiguous labels are riddled with inconsistencies that foreclose careful analysis. For example, many educators now favor emotive terminology, such as "educating for democracy," without being able to define or evaluate the policies advocated to advance such ends. Various notions, such as self-esteem education and inclusion, are now contained in the "democratic education" package. Few of these programs have undergone rigorous evaluation to determine their effects, and, when they have been evaluated, the results often fail to support their ambitious claims.

But that doesn't seem to matter to some. In the words of educational theorist Amy Guttman, democratic education "commits us to accepting nondiscriminatory and non-repressive policies as legitimate even when they are wrong."[9] Even when such practices lead to lower academic achievement, she states, they are necessary to advance the "virtues of citizenship," and even when student participation threatens to produce disorder within schools, it may be defended on "democratic grounds."[10]

These conceptions of democracy are probably not what America's founders had in mind two centuries ago, but they seem to be exactly what Alfie Kohn believes. That is, he wants us to engage elementary school children in "deep, critical reflection about certain ways of being"; to teach reflection over diligence, respect, patriotism, and responsibility; to teach self determination and skepticism over self-control and obedience. He does not suggest where skepticism should begin or end. Still, he is at least skeptical about patriotism: he compares the Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag to a form of "loyalty oath to the Fatherland" (with its obvious Nazi overtones). It would seem consistent with such cynicism to approve as well of 10year-olds' skepticism toward their parents, although wiser students may choose to reserve their skepticism for persons who recommend such questionable doctrines.

The Five Questions

Kohn poses five basic questions that might be asked of character education programs. In answer to the first question "At what level are problems addressed?" - Kohn reiterates the liberal argument that crime and urban decay are political outcomes of unemployment and the consolidation of great wealth in the hands of the few. These "bad things" are the cause of any character problems our young people might have. In other words, "It's all someone else's fault!" Our reply is brief, since we are neither criminologists nor economists - but neither, we believe, is Kohn.

The data we have already cited on steadily rising youth disorder dealt just with whites. Presumably, such a group, even though afflicted with disorder, is not composed of poor inner city residents.

The long-term economic trends affecting most young white Americans involve economic improvements over their parents. Our college students, when we ask them for a show of hands on such matters, usually agree that they will be better off than their parents regarding such things as length of education, quality of housing, length of life span, and quality of health. It appears that the long-term increase in disorder is not caused by the spread of grinding poverty.

The causal connection, if any, between crime and personal income is actually hotly debated. As James Wilson and Richard Herrnstein have emphasized, the overall statistical relationship between crime and the unemployment rate is not very strong.[11] Though many criminals may be poorly educated and are often unemployed, the factors underlying the development of the criminal personality are more complicated.

View of Human Nature

Next, Kohn addresses for-character's view of human nature. And surprise, the for-character educators do not see everything as sweetness and roses. "Fix-the-kids," say prominent for-character educators, who take a "dim view of human nature" (William Kilpatrick), who hold a "pessimistic view of human nature" (Edward Wynne), who say that "children are self-centered" (Kevin Ryan), and who seek to "control [children's] impulses and defer [their] gratification" (Amitai Etzioni).

Kohn is absolutely right! We are horrified and distressed at the harm so many young people are doing to themselves and to one another. We also desperately want to change the destructive conduct of many young people - to protect them and their possible victims. As for being anti-youth, our opinions and prescriptions are generally similar to those approved by young people themselves, as reported in the national high school student poll quoted near the beginning of this article. Are the students also anti-youth?

If modern for-character educators are not utopian in their attitudes toward children, they certainly are not alone. In a recent national survey of American adults, 72% of the respondents said there was an excess of "drugs and violence in their local schools." When the responses were broken down by race, the comparable figures were 58% (whites) and 80% (blacks).[12] Are the blacks who think there's too much violence in their children's schools also anti-youth?

There are important historic precedents for our current concerns. Many of history's best minds have realized that most children and adults don't naturally set about "doing good for intrinsic reasons," as Kohn would suggest. A revealing dialogue from Plato's Republic (Book II) is instructive. Glaucon, a character in The Republic, maintains in a discussion with Socrates that it is natural for people to pursue their own interests despite the needs of others or the need for an orderly society. As evidence, Glaucon tells the story of Gyges, an otherwise rather decent shepherd. Gyges found a magic ring that enabled him to become invisible. The result? Gyges

"seduced the queen and with her help attacked and murdered the king and seized the throne."[13] Of course, the tale of Gyges is a story - all made up. However, does anyone doubt the psychological truth of the ring story? When people receive uncontrolled power, there is a real possibility that they will abuse it. Or, as James Madison put it, "If men were angels, no government would be necessary."

Similarly, Horace Mann, the founder of public education in the U.S., believed that "moral education is a primal necessity of social existence. The unrestrained passions of men are not only homicidal, but suicidal."[14] But contrary to what Kohn would surmise, Mann hoped to form a literate, diligent, productive, and responsible citizenry committed to the conception that the best society was one in which people governed themselves through elected officials and representative institutions. Both Aristotle and Plato advocated a curriculum of music, literature, mathematics, and gymnastics that would result in a "well-balanced and harmonious character."

It would certainly be wrong to characterize these men or the contemporary for-character educators mentioned by Kohn as promoting a totalitarian educational agenda based on their conceptions of an unschooled human nature. To the contrary, it seems more reasonable to conclude that the current for-character perspective represents the collective and rather consistent perspective of the best minds of the past 2,500 years. Such a conclusion seems more promising than the utopian, New Age perspective proposed by Kohn.

Furthermore, the Founders of our nation, from their extensive reading of history, concluded that the greatest threat to democracy was the danger of tyranny that might evolve from the failure of powerful men to meet their civic responsibilities. To prevent such destructive patterns, citizens had to possess such virtues as self-discipline, responsibility, and prudence. Lacking such virtuous citizens, any democracy would gradually decay into a morass of selfishness and jealousy.

John Adams and his wife Abigail exemplified this "republican virtue" in their role as parents. Adams, absent for long periods from his family, wrote to his wife, "Train [our children] to virtue. Habituate them to industry, activity, and spirit."[15] Similarly, George Washington compiled and learned early a set of 110 "Rules of Civility and Decent Behavior in Company and Conversation," which thereafter governed his private behavior and tempered his impulsiveness.[16] The models left us by these men are still worth emulating.

Rather than holding a dark, bleak vision of human nature, these leaders had purpose and courage in the face of danger and suffering. They were indifferent to material circumstances and believed that their legacies would consist of the good and virtuous lives they lived. It is understandable that some citizens in our hedonistic and pedestrian era (What is the going price for a night in Lincoln's bed?) have trouble interpreting their heroic stoicism. Still, we owe it to our young people to try and hold high models up before them. Kohn has missed the point here.

The Ultimate Goal

Kohn next attacks for-character educators for their "profoundly conservative, if not reactionary, agenda." Rather than teach the virtuous life, he wants educators to train children as "advocates for social justice." Rather than set standards for behavior, he wants educators to promote

skepticism in children. Rather than, as Aristotle suggested, "learning that there are things which one is expected to do even when all concerned are aware that one does not feel like doing them . . . [and] that there are things worth doing and aiming for which are not immediately pleasant,"" Kohn wants us to emphasize "the cultivation of autonomy so that children come to experience themselves as 'origins' rather than `pawns: " Thus children should be allowed to participate "in making decisions about their learning and about how they want their classroom to be." We should, Kohn states, stress compassion over loyalty, cooperation over competition, autonomy over punctuality, self-determination over self-control. In truth, those of us concerned with the formation of character engage in no such dichotomous thinking. We want to develop all the virtues.

But children cannot be treated like miniature adults. Nowhere is this issue better exemplified than in recent public service television spots for the United Negro College Fund. In these brief ads, small children are pictured piloting advanced aircraft, sitting behind corporate desks, and teaching in a university classroom, while the announcer suggests: "A mind is a terrible thing to waste." The point behind these gripping presentations is clear: children are only potentially capable of doing the jobs suggested by the images. They are certainly not ready in the early stages of life for the responsibilities that are inherent in adult positions. They need encouragement and training to realize their potential. Their minds are not those of adults. As both Piaget and Kohlberg have shown us, they are not miniature versions of what they will become. Rather, they are, as we now know, thinkers of a qualitatively different kind from the thinkers we hope they will become. This point seems to have been overlooked by Kohn, who seems to believe that by defining the best outcomes for adults we can infer direct implications for classrooms of children. This is just not so.

Allowing students too much freedom to "cultivate autonomy" and too much freedom to "make decisions about their learning" can be detrimental. Three quick examples may suffice to make this obvious point.

A New York Times article (independently verified by one of the authors) told of one "democracy first" public high school in which a discussion took place among the students and teachers - the whole school community -- about whether the students should be allowed to bring knives and to have sex on a school picnic. (They eventually voted the proposal down.)[18]

Robert Howard described an elementary school classroom in which the students, with their classroom teacher's approval, decided that a student who was guilty of spitting on a classmate was to be punished by standing in the middle of his classmates who would each, in turn, spit on the offender. (A more experienced teacher intervened and stopped the punishment.)[19]

Timothy Lensmire invited the students in his third-grade writing project to insert the names of fellow pupils in the stories they composed. He wrote a book on the project and its outcomes. The young authors discovered that using the names of classmates gave them the power to embarrass and shame their peers. Some students so named became very upset. Eventually, Lensmire was distressed about the pain and selfishness his innovation was generating, but - like Hamlet - he could not decide what to do. Fortunately, the principal stepped in and ended the project. Lensmire's book was sympathetically reviewed in an academic journal.[20] The reviewer

disapproved of the principal's intrusion, calling it "institutionalized violence," and commented that, if the project had continued, Lensmire could have transformed his classroom into a court and could have had his writers and injured students hold an in-class lawsuit over the conflict - that is, if someone did not beat up someone else first.

These activities bear some vague, though distorted and uninformed, resemblance to our republican form of government. We say "distorted" because they involve so little accountability for the misuse of student power. Nothing happens to authors who recklessly hurt other students' feelings. As for the picnic, if the "no knives and no sex" resolution had failed, would the students have been collectively liable for any harmful - or deadly -- results? These are just the sort of in-school activities that cultivate poor character in students. Though we feel such activities are comparatively rare in our schools, we believe many readers will be able to identify less dramatic examples of similar tendencies.

What For-Character Educators Want

So what do for-character educators want? What is our ultimate goal? Simply stated, we want children and adolescents to learn to feel a sense of belonging to and responsibility for others. This goal and its rationale come from the work of Emile Durkheim almost 100 years ago. In Durkheim's view, morality and religion, the collective conscience as he called them, are the cohesive bonds that hold the social order together. A breakdown of these values, he believed, would lead to social instability and individual feelings of anxiety and dissatisfaction, sometimes resulting in depression, suicide, and other forms of disorder.

Durkheim exhaustively studied the topic of suicide.[21] He concluded that it - and by extension other types of youth disorder - was largely caused by the affliction of not being immediately needed. Suicide was not particularly related to poverty or to evident social injustice. Instead, people with simple, proximate obligations to others (e.g., mothers, manual laborers, teachers) tended to choose to live through the inevitable "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." They rejected suicide because it was a betrayal of those immediate obligations. (Who will feed the chickens? Who will change the baby's diapers?) These notions are certainly generalizable. Conversely, people with abstract and unclear obligations to others are much more prone to suicide. Young people, especially in our country and in our era, are one class with very remote and vague obligations to others.

Recent sociological studies have reached conclusions generally congruent with Durkheim's broad propositions.[22] One of the authors once examined records of adolescents who had committed suicide. One pitiful file told of a boy whose last act before committing suicide was to kill his beloved dog. Once the ties of responsibility were destroyed, the boy no longer had any obligation to endure the typical buffets of life. In effect, we are often saved by our obligations to others.

Durkheim's theory implies that the young are ignored, unwanted, and lacking in serious responsibilities. The solution involves creating more structured and intense responsibilities. Thus he implies that being extremely permissive toward the young makes things worse. When people are really important to us, we surround their conduct with many forms of constraint and their

misconduct with notable and fast consequences. We demand that the surgeon who will cut us open first wash his or her hands. When we go to an expensive restaurant for a fine meal, we want the waiter to display a little style. When we're playing a sport to win, we want our teammates to go all out. We put people who are really important to us under pressure, and so they feel important.

But too many of today's young people are rarely expected to help support their families, nor are they called on to carry out demanding household chores. Instead, their most typical characteristic is that they are often not very much needed by anyone else. They are ignored. Their roles are largely ornamental. If many of them died, the day-to-day work of the world would continue for the immediate future. People given such freedom can find themselves bored and tempted toward irresponsible and dangerous behavior. The traditional character prescription still applies: "For Satan finds some mischief still for idle hands to do."

We believe that children need age-appropriate but significant responsibilities, in order to feel socially integrated and respected. Adults with authority (i.e., parents, teachers, coaches) should feel comfortable disciplining youngsters who fail to carry out those significant duties. It is, furthermore, the responsibility of adults to critically examine children's and adolescents' social environments and to design and manage them so those environments help our young people grow into mature and moral adults.

These intuitions, based on our collective research, are corroborated by findings about what works with regard to for-character education. Activities in which students assume responsibility (including the acceptance of authority and consequences) for their own learning and behavior and the learning and behavior of others "will result in positive changes in selected prosocial character traits." Moreover, "classroom and school climates that embody such factors as clear standards, mutual respect between students and teachers, and shared governance have been found to be associated with some limited, but nonetheless important, positive changes in student character."[23]

Which Values?

In his fourth question, Kohn wonders, "Which values" should we teach? We agree with him that "whether or not we deliberately adopt a character or moral education program, we are always teaching values." We would say, more precisely, we are always teaching virtues. But which virtues? Though Kohn agrees with the teaching of non-controversial virtues, such as fairness or honesty, he objects to such "conservative" and "potentially controversial" guidelines as "work hard and complete your tasks." Here again, Kohn rebukes for-character educators for sneaking in their propagandistic biases e.g., the Protestant work ethic or obedience. He would prefer that we teach empathy and skepticism.

The for-character tradition recognizes that no single virtue should always dominate, although the virtues are systematically related to form a unity of perspective. Virtuous people we know or read about and admire - e.g., George Washington, Martin Luther King, Mother Teresa - all possessed a measure of the Socratic virtues: wisdom, temperance, justice, and courage. A certain well-roundedness is desirable, and an excess in any one virtue can lead to imbalances. For

example, the fictional Hamlet was reflective and loyal, but indecisive. Richard Nixon was diligent and far-sighted, but also vindictive.

We do not feel qualified to strongly recommend any particular mix of values to educators or parents. We are far more concerned with the openness of the decision-making process, realizing that conflicts do occur over moral priorities. Since their inception American public schools have successfully and regularly resolved conflicts over what should be taught. Such disputes are the day-to-day routines of our democratic processes. Differences are scrutinized, pros and cons are subjected to public debate, compromises are negotiated, and votes are cast.

There are, of course, many sources that offer specific answers to the question of which virtues we should teach. One such set is embodied in the principles laid out in the U.S. Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and other founding documents (e.g., justice, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, freedom of the press, freedom of religion, and so on). Another set of answers is the common core of virtues alluded to throughout this article: honesty, love, compassion, duty, respect, responsibility, diligence, and so on. A third set of answers can be found in the growing number of communities that have adopted common core virtues for their own children. Yet another set of answers can be found in the six pillars growing out of the Aspen Declaration of 1992: caring, civic virtue and citizenship, justice and fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness. Since America is the world's most religious industrialized country, it would be incongruous if some of that tradition did not influence the setting of priorities with regard to virtue. This might touch on such matters as chastity, the sanctity of marriage, honoring one's parents or others in authority, or displaying charity. The list goes on.

What Is Our Theory of Learning?

The pedagogical principles we advocate are simple and direct.
- Identify and list the virtues and relevant behavior traits one hopes children will learn. (There are a variety of virtues to choose from and a variety of sources for those virtues.)
- Establish those identified virtues or traits as goals for students and the faculty.
- Provide occasions for students, either individually or as part of well-designed groups, to practice the behaviors associated with such traits or virtues.
- Praise students, either individually or as a group publicly or privately - when desirable behavior, consistent with expectations, is displayed.
- Identify undesirable traits and prohibit them. Publicize and justify such prohibitions, and establish and enforce clear, unpleasant, and appropriate consequences for such misbehavior by individuals or groups.
- Use the school's formal curriculum and ceremonies to support such activities.
- Hire, train, and retain staff members who actively support such policies.[24]

Kohn characterizes this approach as nothing more than "exhortation and directed recitation . . . teaching as a matter of telling and compelling." Teachers in for-character classrooms, he states, are encouraged to engage in a variety of measures to get students to conform: praising children who respond correctly, prohibiting wrongdoing, and inculcating habits such as perseverance, delay of gratification, and self-control. He's correct. But this approach is far more than simplistic

"exhortation." We believe that straightforward tactics will improve academic and for-character learning and help save students' lives.

As to for-character vocabulary, we intend such words as instill in, transmit to, and habit formation to describe the process of character development and mature moral decision-making. These are, however, not our words. They are the words of Plato and Aristotle, of Kant and Piaget. They are the collective knowledge of our best minds over time.

So how do schools best help shape the character of the young? Our answer is clear. Effective schools share the same systemic characteristics researchers have observed in highly effective parents.[25] Similarly, less-effective schools share characteristics of less-effective, laissez-faire parents. That is, well grounded teachers and schools set high expectations and nourish children's earned sense of competence and self-reliance. They rely on extrinsic control, clarity, consistency, nurture, and honesty of communication to shape their students' character. They are primarily concerned for the well-being of the children. We believe that schools with these characteristics are more likely to graduate students who are accomplished academically and who demonstrate the habits and character traits that lead to productive citizenship. We believe that this is what good schools have always been about.

The Bog of Intrinsic Motivation

Kohn strongly opposes all measures that involve incentives, since they rely on external motivation. His position is, in effect, that, as long as such constraints are applied, students will not be free. That is, they will not practice learning for intrinsic reasons. The matter can be put in a more critical way: Kohn is less interested in stimulating students toward excellence in academics or character formation than many other educators. His case requires him to find strong evidence that recognition, praise, and other earned rewards do not habituate people to be kind, honest, or diligent. In other words, well-deserved praise does not encourage people to make a habit of their praised conduct. This is a rather fantastic position, countered by recent research and everyday experience.[26]

Allow us to provide just one instance of such everyday experience of the deep power of extrinsic motivation over learning. As part of a study of a typical suburban high school, one of the authors identified various systems to motivate learning that were used in that school. Each system was accompanied by its own unique intrinsic and extrinsic rewards. The most powerful and effective learning systems were associated with interscholastic competitive team athletics.

This "discovery" simply represents the researcher's having stumbled into a widely recognized pattern. In many schools, a great deal of attention is given to athletics. Much of this attention consists of public praise, publicity, and other forms of conspicuous display. The point so often forgotten, though, is that such extrinsic motivation systems work very well! Student athletes work long and hard to learn how to improve their skills, and often they succeed. The members of the swimming team, for example, practiced arduously for four hours a day over the 20-day Christmas vacation. And when the members of the girls' varsity volleyball team returned to school in the fall, their coach publicly tested each player to see if she had managed to improve her jumping and speed since their last practices. All the other school teams applied equivalent

beginthe-season tests. It was understood by the athletes that training started well before each season began. Obviously, extrinsic motivation to learn has not turned off student athletes; it has just made them work harder at learning their skills.

Finally, Kohn offers his example of a good school program that promotes children's moral and social development. He presents the Child Development Project (CDP), whose premise is that, "by meeting children's needs, we increase the likelihood that they will care about others." However, one of the authors helped conduct a four-year direct comparison of students in CDP schools with students attending a public school with a strong for-character program.

In contrast to the CDP schools, the for-character school established specific, measurable goals, standards, and performance indicators; conducted frequent, systematic assessments of performance; measured and rated school performance relative to the goals and published the results; publicly recognized schools, classes, and individuals for achieving goals; and supported school personnel in their efforts to achieve school goals. In other words, it was not the type of school in which Kohn would enroll his children.

Although there were major differences between the CDP program and the for-character program, both seem to have had positive effects on students, and, of the hundreds of variables studied, there were numerous areas in which neither program was significantly or consistently differentiated from the other.[27] But the teachers in the for-character school, as opposed to teachers in the CDP schools, rated their school as more businesslike, creative, and innovative, with more involved and supportive parents, a more supportive and accessible principal, a more traditional academic focus, a pleasanter atmosphere, and better relations between teachers and students. And students in the for-character school scored higher on measures of self-esteem in the third and fourth grades than did students in the CDP schools. These positive results in a school with clear for-character policies should not extinguish other experiments designed to improve student character. However, the results do counter such misleading pictures as the one sketched by Alfie Kohn.

[Footnotes]

1. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Public Health Service, Bureau of Vital Statistics, and predecessor agencies have compiled annual vital statistics reports on specific topics for appropriate years (homicide and suicide, 1914-94; out-of-wedlock births, 1940-93). **2.** Judith Haveman, "A Nation of Violent Children: A New Survey Finds the Epidemic Is Confined Almost Exclusively to the U.S.," Washington Post National Weekly Edition, 17 February 1997, p. 34. **3**. Jean Johnson and Steve Farkas, Getting By: What American Teenagers Really Think About Their Schools (New York: Public Agenda, 1997). **4**. Over the past few years many books have documented exemplary programs in character education. None of these school programs relied primarily on packaged character education programs, though some did use them. See Jacques S. Benninga, ed., Moral, Character, and Civic Education in the Elementary School (New York: Teachers College Press, 1991); Philip F. Vincent, Promising Practices in Character Education: Nine Success Stories from Around the Country (Chapel Hill, N.C.: Character Development Group,1996); and Edward A. Wynne, A Year in the Life of an Excellent Elementary School (Lancaster, Pa.: Technomics, 1993). **5.** "List of 100 For-Character Activities and Policies," in Edward A. Wynne and Kevin Ryan, Reclaiming Our Schools: A Handbook on Teaching Character Academics, and Discipline (New York: Merrill, 1997), pp. 197-202. **6.** See,

for example, Stephen L. Carter, Integrity (New York: HarperCollins, 1996); William Damon, Greater Expectations: Overcoming the Culture of Indulgence in America's Homes and Schools (New York: Free Press,1996); Jack Frymier et al., Values on Which We Agree (Bloomington, Ind.: Phi Delta Kappa Educational Foundation, 1995); Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Demoralization of Society: From Victorian Virtues to Modern Values (New York: Alfred A. Knopf.,1995); William Kilpatrick, Gregory Wolfe, and Suzanne M. Wolfe, Books That Build Character: A Guide to Teaching Your Child Moral Values Through Stories (New York: Simon & Schuster,1994); Alex Molnar, ed., The Construction of Children's Character: 96th NSSE Yearbook, Part II (Chicago: National Society for the Study of Education, University of Chicago Press, 1997); and Wynne and Ryan, op. cit. **7.** William K. Frankena, Ethics (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963), p. 53. **8.** See, for example, Robert E. Slavin, "Reforming State and Federal Policies to Support Adoption of Proven Practices," Educational Researcher, December 1996, p. 4, in which Slavin comments that "year after year, the achievement of American children remains unchanged.... Yet, in what other area of American life would we be satisfied to say that things have simply become no worse over the past quarter century?" Slavin was writing about the academic achievement of youths; we have shown that the moral indicators have declined over this same time period. **9.** Amy Gutmann, Democratic Education (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 288. 10. Ibid. **11.** James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, Crime and Human Nature (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1985). **12**. Jean Johnson and John Immerwahr, First Things First: What Americans Expect from the Public Schools (New York: Public Agenda, 1994). **13.** Plato, The Republic, trans. H. D. P.Lee (Baltimore: Penguin Books,1955), pp 90-91. **14**. Horace Mann, as quoted in Lori Sandford Wiley, Comprehensive Character-Building Classroom (Manchester, N.H.: Character Development Foundation, 1997), p. 28. **15**. Lawrence Cremin, American Education: The Colonial Years (New York: Harper Torchbook, 1970), p. 479. **16**. Richard Brookhiser, "A Man on Horseback," Atlantic, January 1996, p. 61. **17**. Sarah Broadie, Ethics with Aristotle (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 109. **18**. Edward A. Wynne, "Character and Academics in the Elementary School," in Benninga, ed., p. 142. **19.** Robert W. Howard, "Lawrence Kohlberg's Influence on Moral Education in Elementary Schools," in Benninga, ed., pp. 61-62. **20**. John Willinsky, "The Underside of Empowerment," Educational Researcher, March 1995, pp. 31-32. **21.** Emile Durkheim, Suicide: A Study in Sociology, trans. John A. Spaulding and George Simpson (Glencoe, Ill.: Free Press, 1951). **22.** R. W. Marris, "Sociology of Suicide," in Seymour Perlin, ed., A Handbook for the Study of Suicide (New York: Oxford University Press,1975), pp. 93-112. **23.** James S. Leming, Character Education: Lessons from the Past, Models for the Future (Camden, Me.: Institute for Global Ethics, 1993), p. 16. **24.** Edward A. Wynne, "Transmitting Character in Schools - Some Common Questions and Answers," The Clearing House, January/February 1995, pp. 151-53. **25.** See Eleanor Maccoby, Social Development: Psychological Growth and the Parent/Child Relationship (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich,1980), pp. 382-83; and Diane Baumrind, "The Development of Instrumental Competence Through Socialization," in Anne D. Pick, ed., Minnesota Symposium on Child Psychology, vol. 7 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1973). **26.** Judy Cameron and W. David Pierce, "The Debate About Rewards and Intrinsic Motivation: Protests and Accusations Do Not Alter the Results," Review of Educational Research, vol. 66, 1996, pp. 39-51. **27.** Jacques S. Benninga et al., "Effects of Two Contrasting School Task and Incentive Structures on Children's Social Development," Elementary School Journal, vol. 92, 1991, pp. 149-67. K