Coaching Character

Above, students take part in "gymcraftics" exercises at Boston English High School. The program is led by John McCarthy, head of SED’s Institute for Athletic Coach Education. With intensive yearlong programs such as "Team Support" at English High, McCarthy trains youth coaches to understand and fulfill the responsibilities inherent in their role. Through sport, McCarthy says, youngsters can learn “personal social responsibility” as well as “transferable life skills.”

“Sport offers a unique opportunity to develop all sorts of good habits in kids because they come to it of their own volition,” McCarthy says. “Kids may not want to do their math homework, but they want to come work out or play some game or do some physical activity. It’s a tool we have as educators and we don’t fully realize its potential.”

McCarthy’s institute is just one facet of SED’s newly renamed Center for Character & Social Responsibility. Our story on the CCSR begins on p. 6.

Can teaching ethics change society?

Renamed and recharged, the Center for Character & Social Responsibility has been training teachers to teach character development for 20 years.

Also Inside:
- Upward Bound at BU celebrates 20 years
- Fighting for the whistleblower
Dear Alumni and Friends,

What happened to education in the news? During the last presidential campaign it was considered one of the three most important issues in America. Now the topic has disappeared from the New York Times’ website. You can still find articles about education if you search for them—but the economy and health care seem to have bumped the subject off the front page. Certainly, these issues are crucial. But education can contribute to both economic and health outcomes.

Some aspects of educational reform are getting attention. A major item in the news is the push from the federal government to identify the relationship between a teacher’s performance and student achievement and then use this relationship to determine teacher compensation. This is a highly controversial issue that raises concerns about reliable evaluation tools and punishing teachers who work in underperforming schools. It raises the question—what do we base our assessment of teachers’ work? In medicine, for example, hospitals use chart reviews. If something goes wrong in a surgery, there’s a record of what the surgeon did, so that the hospital can determine whether the surgeon made a mistake, or whether a problem occurred that was outside of her or his control. Schools need to be equally diligent in holding teachers accountable for student performance, but teachers should receive adequate professional development to help them meet the needs of students. The science of teacher evaluation also needs to be improved. It is extremely important to find a way to involve the teachers’ unions more thoroughly and collaboratively in this process. Systems for evaluating teachers must reflect fair labor practices and set a high bar for performance. These are great challenges.

The other focus of educational news has been on the claim that schools of education are doing a mediocre job of preparing teachers to be effective in the 21st century. These criticisms use a pretty broad brush to paint the picture. It’s like saying “all lawyers are sharks.” Many schools around the country are attracting high-quality students, and producing very effective teachers. They are integrating theory with supervised practical experience, and preparing teachers for a future in which they will be under a microscope.

At Boston University, we at SED hold our students under a microscope in order to prepare them to be exemplary teachers. When they take their content courses in the College of Arts and Sciences, they are evaluated regularly for their ability to synthesize and articulate that content. In their methods courses at SED, they work on projects under faculty direction as they learn to integrate content into developmentally appropriate lesson plans. When they are student teaching, their work is observed not only by their classroom teacher but by an SED supervisor as well. This kind of solid evaluation should continue once they’ve graduated and are out in the field. Such a system applied across the board will help improve our teachers’ ability to perform in the classroom, and, as a result, it will boost the success of our children.

I want to thank you for all that you do to support our ability to prepare effective teachers. Your support for our scholarship program allows us to enroll talented undergraduates. Your support of the Dean’s Fund and special projects to support our engagement with students in Boston Public Schools, the Dads Road program at the Trotter Elementary School, the newly instituted Alumni Speakers Series, the launching of the Center for Character and Social Responsibility (see p. 6), and many other important activities at SED. I encourage you to visit our website, where you will find a copy of our strategic plan, and I look forward to your feedback.

I hope you enjoy this issue of @SED. As always, my colleagues and I want to hear from you. Call, write, or e-mail us, or visit the School. Let us know about your accomplishments, and tell us what you think we can do to continue carrying out our mission of bettering our community and the field of teaching. Look for us on Facebook under @BU SED and become our fan—we’d love to hear from you!

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Psychotherapy and a Psycho Thriller
James McMahon ('79) published two books in 2009: one is a self-help book for victims of trauma and abuse, the other a detective novel. A retired psychotherapist, McMahon says the two books aren’t as different as they may at first seem. Both, he says, draw upon his professional experiences in psychotherapy.

The novel, Predators Escape, tells the story of a homicide detective turned private eye who discovers treachery and corruption—and, of course, a little romance—after taking on a seemingly straightforward missing persons case. McMahon says he mined his experience as a psychotherapist while writing the book to create authentic characters with true-to-life motivations.

His second book, How the Family Goes, So Goes Everything: A Psycho thriller, presents the stories of real people in an effort to help victims of trauma and chronic abuse realize they can reconstruct their lives and become happier and healthier.

According to McMahon’s publisher, Strategic Book Publishing, parents can use it to help their kids realize they too can overcome their adversities.

Making Friends, Despite ADHD
Many children with attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) have trouble making friends. Children with ADHD are often impulsive, aggressive, and apt to misinterpret social cues—none of which makes them popular with their peers.

A new book by Esta M. Rapoport ('07), an assistant professor of special education at the College of New Rochelle in New York, gives parents and teachers tools to help these children find social success.

ADHD and Social Skills: A Step-by-Step Guide for Teachers and Parents offers concrete methods for teaching children with ADHD appropriate social skills. It also includes useful examples and anecdotes from Rapoport’s field research with families of children with ADHD.

FACULTY FOCUS

Myths Dispelled
By Corinne Steinbrenner

Myth #1: People with autism will always be dependent on others for care.
Many individuals with autism learn to be independent and lead productive lives,” says Lehr. A classic example is Temple Grandin, who was diagnosed (correctly, it’s believed) with autism as a child in the 1950s and is now an associate professor of animal science at Colorado State University and author of several books, including her memoir Emergence: Labeled Autistic.

Myth #2: Autism can be cured.
While Grandin and others have proved it’s possible for some people to successfully manage their autism, there is no cure for the disorder, says Lehr: “Children’s autistic characteristics can be decreased and some children might be able to develop very high levels of functioning, but—regardless of how early or intensive the intervention—they will continue to have characteristics that are consistent with the definition of autism.”

Myth #3: There is one best way to educate children with autism.
Hundreds of studies have shown the effectiveness of the applied behavioral analysis (ABA) approach to treating autism—an approach that uses positive reinforcement to teach each step of a desired behavior. But Lehr suggests parents and teachers be open to trying other interventions. “It’s possible that other approaches as effective as ABA,” she says. “We just don’t yet have the data to support them.

“I think the best thing we can do for individual children,” she continues, “is to try out an approach, take data on the child’s progress, and make decisions based on what works best for that child.”

Myth #4: One-on-one intervention is best.

Discrete trial training—a method of ABA intervention that involves intensive one-on-one drills of commands, responses, and rewards—has become increasingly popular, but Lehr is wary of such unnatural learning. “We’re talking about very little kids sitting in a chair one-on-one with a teacher, drilling and practicing 40 hours a week,” she says. Recent research suggests incorporating ABA into natural daily routines may be more effective in producing skills that children with autism can generalize into everyday situations. It’s as yet unclear which approach works best, says Lehr, “but consideration should be given to the naturalness of the instruction and to the opportunities children with autism have to interact with and learn among nondisabled peers.”

For class notes and other info, visit SED’s new and improved website, www.bu.edu/SED
HELPING INNER-CITY YOUTH

Dream BIG

For more than 20 years, Upward Bound at BU has broken down the barriers between underprivileged high school students and a university education.

It’s not rocket science, but it’s close. Jet engine designer Mudasarr Muhammad ticks off his recent projects at General Electric: finishing the design of the GE38 engine for a heavy-lift helicopter, supporting the production of the CT7-8A engine for the S-92 aircraft, working on control systems for commercial jet engines...

You get the idea—this is one smart guy. Yet when he started high school, Muhammad’s chances of making it to college looked slight. Let’s rewind 12 years.

At age 14, Muhammad and his family moved to the United States from Pakistan. Dropped into the ninth grade of an unfamiliar high school in an unfamiliar country, Muhammad admits he “had no idea about college,” to postsecondary education, but just 35.5 percent had completed college by June 2007. In contrast, 96 percent of the public school students in Upward Bound at BU went on to postsecondary education and 75 percent had completed college by 2007.

“We have two impacts on academic outcomes,” says Dennehy, who joined the program in 1990 as an undergraduate tutor. “There are students who probably wouldn’t go to college if it weren’t for the program; there’s also a group of students for whom we’ve had an impact on the selectivity of the college they’re going to.”

One of the program’s current 75 students, Brighton High senior Gabriell Sutherland, falls firmly into the first bracket. He admits he was “nervous and scared” about joining because, “I never really saw myself going to college.” Now Sutherland is aiming high—veterinarian, engineer, and lawyer are all mentioned as possible careers—particularly after watching his brother drop out of high school: “Seeing the life he’s going through is motivating me,” says Sutherland. “He’s doing good, but he could be doing better if he’d stayed in school and gone to college.”

For youth like Sutherland, the program’s promise of economic transformation, according to Travers. The aspiring teachers include pharmacy, law, IT, and news production—also send a message to the local community.

“People can look up to him and say, ‘Hey, if Troy can do it, then I could do it too.’” Castillo hopes Troy’s newfound ambitions—current contenders include pharmacy, law, IT, and news production—also send a message to the local community. “I want people to look up to him,” Castillo says of his son, a student at Boston’s troubled English High. “I want him to be a positive role model for young black men when he comes back to his neighbor- hood after he gets his degree and has a nice job, so other young people can look up to him and say, ‘Hey, if Troy can do it, then I could do it too.’”

SED giving a home to a program that gives underprivileged kids a shot at college and produces better teachers? It’s not rocket science, but it could be.

Find out more about Upward Bound at BU, and sister programs at BU’s UB website, www.bu.edu/ub.

An aim of the program can be found on Facebook.
The Ripple Effect

Renamed and recharged, the Center for Character & Social Responsibility widens the umbrella.

For more than twenty years, Boston University has been at the forefront of a movement asserting that character development belongs in the classroom—that learning right from wrong is as vital to a full education as reading and math.

Seider, an assistant professor of education at SED since 2008, represents a new generation of scholars devoted, like his predecessor Professor Emeritus Kevin Ryan, to Socrates’ proposition that schools should produce people who are both smart and good.

But while Ryan, who founded the Center for the Advancement of Ethics & Character (CAEC) at SED two decades ago, was responding in large part to an alarming rise in teenage pregnancy, drug use, and violence, Seider is concerned about an equally alarming epidemic of apathy and ignorance.

For teachers on how to use these stories to impart morals, Math and science can be marshalled, too. “You’re teaching them pre-cision, problem-solving, thoughtfulness, accuracy, patience,” Bohlin points out.

Carl Hobert teaching what he calls “preventive diplomacy” to students at Harlem Renaissance High School. The SED adjunct faculty member’s Axis of Hope is affiliated with the Center for Character & Social Responsibility.

worrying about a crop of youngsters who tune into American Idol instead of their local mayoral election.

Seider calls his area of research civic development. “I’m looking at what schools and universities can do to deepen young adults’ sense of responsibility as citizens.” That field, and the fields of civic engagement, positive psychology, performance excellence, and preventive diplomacy, have all found a place at SED alongside bedrock virtues such as respect, temperance, and fortitude.

This spring, the entity formerly known as the CAEC officially announces its rebirth as the Center for Character & Social Responsibility (CCSR). The center’s mission is to support professional development for educators—both faculty and students, inside and outside BU—who are seeking to integrate character development and social responsibility into the classroom.

The newly reinvigorated center has “a broader view of what character development is about,” says Dean Hardin Coleman. “Historically, the center has been focused on individual virtue and ethics and individual development of character. That’s incredibly important. But some people believe that the next step from individual personal development is actually doing something in the world.”

“Building the spiritual core of BU is a history of social responsibility,” Coleman adds. “That’s how BU got started! Methodist preachers recognized they had a responsibility to do social work, to educate, to heal with medicine. . . . So the name of the center reflects the history of the University.”

Building on the foundation

In the late 1980s, a rising tide of shootings, drug abuse, and teen pregnancy overwhelmed American parents and educators. Ryan and a few other experts blamed schools for losing their moral moorings in the wake of the turbulent 1960s. “The words ‘character’ and ‘virtue’ were marginalized as antithetical to some of the goals and claims of the sexual revolution,” says Karen Bohlin (’95, ’99), a longtime Ryan colleague. “So what you saw in the ’70s was a lot of ‘values clarification,’ a lot of pseudo-therapeutic approaches—I don’t stand for anything, you don’t stand for anything.” It was an absurd vacuum. "Kevin reclaimed the intellectual history, the substance, and the legitimacy (of teaching) character and virtue” in schools, Bohlin says. "Character education’s about reclaiming the noble purpose of teaching. It’s about providing children and young people with what they deserve: the fullest education possible."

In 1989, as BU celebrated its sesquicentennial, Ryan founded the CAEC and began running five-day retreats for schools and state education departments across the country. Bohlin became assistant director of the center, and eventually executive director when Ryan retired. The two co-authored a book, Building Character in Schools: Practical Ways to Bring Moral Instruction to Life.

Initially, many parents and teachers were skeptical, especially since some in the character education movement talked about inculcating “values” in children. Ryan and Bohlin, however, eschew that loaded word in favor of virtues. Honesty, self-mastery, responsibility, fairness—these are habits highly regarded across traditions, says Bohlin. “It’s not just our shared Western moral heritage, but our shared human heritage.”

The Ryan strain of character education sees literature as rife with lessons about ethical behavior. In 2000, Bohlin opened BU’s Ryan Library for Ethics & Education, filling its shelves with classics, from E. B. White’s Charlotte’s Web to Fyodor Dostoevsky’s Crime and Punishment, along with study guides for teachers on how to use these stories to impart morals. Math and science can be marshalled, too. “You’re teaching them pre-cision, problem-solving, thoughtfulness, accuracy, patience,” Bohlin points out.
The character education movement went mainstream pretty quickly, gaining endorsements from Barbara Bush, Jesse Jackson, President Bill Clinton, Americans United for the Separation of Church and State, and the National Education Association.

Over two decades, the CAEC mounted dozens of retreats, or “teachers’ academies,” and scores of other professional development outlets, reaching hundreds of educators, many of whom keep in touch via the center’s newsletter Character, published quarterly since 1992.

The focus on ethics and character is not going away. Within the newly reconstituted CCSR will sit the Programs for the Advancement of Ethics & Character, carrying on the center’s tradition with many more academies and Character issues to come.

Rohlin is now senior scholar at the center and continues its work while heading the Montrose School, which made development outlets, reaching hundreds of educators, many of whom keep in touch via the center’s newsletter Character, published quarterly since 1992.

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Soon after issuing her complaints, Greenhouse lost her post.

“They denoted her,” says Kohn. “Shoved her into a basement and stripped her of her contract authority.” She filed suit, and the FBI and Justice Department began continuing investigations of KBR. In March 2009, President Barack Obama announced an end to the Bush-era practice of no-bid contracts. All in great measure thanks to Kohn’s tireless efforts and round of appearances in the national media, such as on MSNBC’s Hardball with Chris Matthews.

And lest anyone suspect Kohn’s firm of partisanship, note their highest-profile client of all time: Linda Tripp. “We have represented Democrats, Republicans,” says Kohn. “It does not matter who they blow the whistle on or who’s in power; we’re just gonna do it straight.”

Here’s how the New York Daily News succinctly summarized Tripp’s case when the Defense Department staffer filed suit in September 1999: “Linda Tripp, who secretly taped her personal conversations with presidential paramour Monica Lewinsky, sued the White House and her Pentagon bosses yesterday for violating her privacy.”

Directed the irony—Tripp was herself under indictment for illegal wiretapping in Maryland—the fact remains that her superiors broke the law when they leaked damaging personnel records to The New Yorker, revealing that Tripp had been arrested for shoplifting at age 19. Tripp contended the leak was retaliation for her role in President Bill Clinton’s impeachment. In a statement issued through Kohn’s firm, Tripp said, “The government should never be permitted to use Privacy Act–protected information to discredit a political opponent.” She won.

These are but two of the many whistleblowers Kohn and his partners, brother Michael Kohn and David Colapinto (CAS ’84), have fought for more than two decades, both through their firm and through the advocacy organization National Whistleblowers Center, of which Stephen Kohn is the executive director.

Kohn has won precedent-setting cases. He has authored dozens of scholarly articles and a pile of books regarding employment law, civil liberties, and other law topics. He has blazed a trail, virtually creating a coherent field of law where none had existed.

According to a profile of Kohn in Super Lawyers magazine, “whistleblowing was still an obscure concept and certainly not a recognized area of law” when Kohn started out in the early ’80s. “There was no case history. So Kohn wrote it himself.” Digging up and synthesizing obscure precedents, Kohn authored the first legal treatise on whistleblowing, Protecting Environmental and Nuclear Whistleblowers: A Litigation Manual.

What Kohn enjoys most about his work, however, isn’t found in dusty law libraries.

“You get to help an individual who’s in a crisis,” Kohn says, explaining his job’s appeal. “You can actually have real impact on someone’s life. Their career, their job, their reputation, the way they view themselves. And it’s someone who tried to do the right thing. So it’s someone you want to help. And sometimes you’re able to. And that’s very satisfying. It’s kind of like representing an innocent person who is wrongfully accused.”

Oftentimes, a Kohn client will be a Serpico-like figure, vilified by his colleagues as a “boy scout” for playing by the rules. When FBI agent Frederic Whitehurst raised concerns about possible misconduct in the Bureau’s crime lab in the mid-1990s, he lost his job and likely fell off a few holiday-card lists. With Kohn as attorney, Whitehurst won a settlement and vindication.

But the case had broader impact. President Clinton issued an executive order still in effect that established whistleblower protections for FBI employees. And instead of the Bureau policing itself, the Justice Department’s inspector general automatically reviews any allegations of misconduct within the FBI. “Outside oversight— that had not been achieved,” Kohn says. “Through illegal monitoring of Martin Luther King Jr. [GRS ’55], all the abuses of [former director J. Edgar] Hoover . . . They existed as an insular little system.” Not anymore.

“You can’t get much better than that,” Kohn says. “Actually using the skills you’ve learned to help someone—and someone who really stuck their neck out to help the public interest.”

Most every case Kohn handles carries implications for the rest of us. “The United States has recovered well over a billion dollars now,” Kohn says. “From information that our clients had given to the government. That helps the taxpayer.” Not to mention, he adds, it may deter other crooked contractors and corrupt public servants.

“In this business, you have to be willing to stand up pretty hard,” Kohn says. “Because there are lots of pressures. The companies that you end up suing, or the institutions, are very powerful. And you’ve got to be tough.”
A Beginner’s Guide to
Eco-Friendly HOMES

Sheri Koones (’70) admits that when she began managing the renovation of her family’s new Connecticut home in 1996, she knew nothing about building houses. “I’d lived in an apartment most my life,” says the former New York fashion executive. “So I went to the library and took out every book I could find on home construction.”

When the books proved only mildly helpful, Koones decided to write her own building and remodeling guide. From Sand Castles to Dream Houses, published in 2002, launched her writing career and sparked an ongoing interest in prefabricated homes.

Koones recently spoke with Q&A about her fifth book, Prefabulous + Sustainable, which includes a foreword by actor and environmentalist Robert Redford and is due out this spring.

Q: How would you summarize your new book?
A: The book profiles 25 of the greenest houses in North America. How’s that for a fun read? Prefab is the greenest way to build a house because there’s very little waste. Prefab is the greenest way to build a house because there’s very little waste. For more information, visit: www.sherikoones.com.

And if that’s not enough, there are many features that are not expensive. A lot of the houses have dual-flush toilets and low-flow sinks for water conservation. And most of them use passive solar techniques: they’re situated on the property so that they get the most advantage of the sun; they have overhangs that block the sun in the summer and encourage it in the winter; and many of the houses have concrete floors, which absorb and reradiate heat.

All the homes in your book are prefabricated. What are the benefits of prefabrication compared with building onsite?
A: Prefab is the greenest way to build a house because there’s very little waste. There are very few Dumpsters onsite, and there’s a small percentage of waste in the factory. Also, there’s a big disturbance to the property when you’re building onsite. With my house, they ripped up the property and piled dirt and supplies everywhere. With prefab, the house is just brought in, with little disturbance to the neighborhood—none of that noise and banging. People from the neighborhood go to work, and when they come back there’s a house there.

Prefab is used to have a bad reputation. What’s different about today’s prefab?
A: The original prefab houses were like the Sears Roebuck house—they were very, very simple. But over the years they’ve found that you can do almost anything with prefab. Today’s prefab houses are not just doublewide and simple boxes. And there are several different kinds of prefab construction. Most people equate prefab with modular, but there are other methods of prefabrication—panelized construction, structural insulated panels, timber frame, and so on. There are lots of different ways people can do this.

For more information, visit: www.sherikoones.com.

In case anyone has missed it, we are involved in the newest great debate: How to educate children in the 21st century inasmuch as they are, apparently, so different than the children of the 20th century. How to teach to the screen-gazing, gismo-carrying student, the student with the camera and computer, and, for all I know, an atom-splitting device built into his or her cell phone. Everything now must be on PowerPoint. Online courses are so perfect for generating revenues, they simply have to define the next great pedagogic terrain.

Yet the iPods, iPhones, BlackBerrys, and all the fantastical software are not the only things that ought to grab our attention. We might wish to look as well at the power of a culture in defining the role of technology and, for that matter, the very meaning of education. Public schools, the way we perceive and appraise students and teachers, learning and knowledge, all derive from the culture, which in part means the histories of our people. School, teacher, student are mere constructs, the products of our experience, imagination, and intelligence. They are, simply put, whatever we choose to make them. Culture influences what we know, the ways we know, the ways we lead our lives. No culture, no dreams. No culture, no minds.

One has to salute the U.S. Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, and recognize that, clearly, he wants all of America’s children to be properly, thoughtfully, and respectfully educated. Schools of education must join him in this crusade, and as a claim to membership, we probably have to admit to our occasional failings, obduracy, and self-interest. But to blame schools of education for the failure of thousands of public schools, as the secretary did recently, is to me as foolish as alleging that the Twitter technology will save the American public school.

The question, therefore, is just how does an entire culture learn to break down long-standing racial and economic barriers, to erect structures guaranteeing justice—that is what will eventually allow all children to attend first-rate schools, where teachers long to teach and want to send their own children. In Grant’s words: “Equal educational opportunity keeps the gates of promise open and prevents America from establishing impassable walls of social class and privilege . . . All children, not just the poor, benefit from diverse perspectives and a more complex sense of what evidence and frames of analysis are useful in solving complex problems.”

The Education Secretary knows this as well. It does not go unnoticed that in his speech castigating schools of education, he includes names like John Dewey, William James, and Henry Adams (not to mention Rodney Dangerfield). Sometimes, as drearily old-fashioned as it sounds, one finds it necessary to revisit some long-dead folks. Sometimes, as arduous as it sounds, a culture does well to look at the writings that form the predicates upon which societies, governments, and human conduct are constructed, the very predicates that undergird as well our capacities to appraise societies, governments, and human conduct. And did I mention that none of the authors of these foundational writings used PowerPoint?

The author is Professor of Education at Boston University. His books include All Peril: Stories of Injustice; Mind Fields: Adolescent Consciousness in a Culture of Distraction; and A Sense of Self: The Work of Affirmation. This article is excerpted from his longer essay “Pining the Secretary,” which can be found at www.bu.edu/sand/cottie.