THE SELFLESS STAR OF SED

For four decades of stellar leadership, Joan Dee served the SED community with loving care (p. 4)

Also Inside:
- Ethics for eighth graders? A study (p. 10)
- Militant energy in language ed (p. 8)
Dear Alumni and Friends,

It is an incredibly exciting time to be at SED. Every fall brings the return of students to Comm Ave. Our new freshmen have completed outstanding high school careers. They come to us with high GPAs, excellent SAT scores, and spots in the top 10 percent of their graduating classes. They come from 19 different states as well as China and Korea. We also have 13 students transferring in from other universities and colleges, all sharing the desire to take advantage of our wonderful faculty—including eight new professors (see News & Notes, opposite) who will prepare them to become the type of great teachers who inspired us to perform at the best of our abilities when we were students. Our building bubbles with this hope and promise.

As we talk with alumni and superintendents around the country, we continue to be impressed by the excellent leadership roles our graduates play in their schools. We have one recent alum who has been nominated to be a teacher leader within a new charter school in New Orleans; another who has been asked to create an innovative program in Boxboro, Massachusetts; to serve the needs of struggling math learners in high school; and a third who has been asked to take on a leadership role in creating a high-scope Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics curriculum in Marlborough, Massachusetts. As everyone from the Gates Foundation to the Secretary of Education has come to learn, the cornerstone of effective school reform is highly effective teachers who are willing and able to become leaders in their schools.

I want to end by thanking you for your ongoing support of the School, which makes it possible for us to complete our mission. Not only do we want your support for our students in their clinical placements, you also are eager to hire them upon graduation. Your gifts to the School help us provide our students with the support they need to go to college and continue to be impressed by the excellent leadership roles our graduates play in their schools. We have one recent alum who has been nominated to be a teacher leader within a new charter school in New Orleans; another who has been asked to create an innovative program in Boxboro, Massachusetts; to serve the needs of struggling math learners in high school; and a third who has been asked to take on a leadership role in creating a high-scope Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics curriculum in Marlborough, Massachusetts. As everyone from the Gates Foundation to the Secretary of Education has come to learn, the cornerstone of effective school reform is highly effective teachers who are willing and able to become leaders in their schools.

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On our alumni’s accomplishments that the BU School of Education is doing an excellent job of preparing such educational leaders. The theme of the presentation was a wax museum, Wilkins explains. Each student chose a historical figure and researched and wrote a one-minute speech about that person’s life and significance. One parent later told Wilkins about a family trip to Rome: “Her child had been Julius Caesar in the wax museum. She said the tour guide asked her to tell her son to be quiet because he kept interrupting the tour to give additional information he had learned from his project. It was pretty great to hear that.”

WAXING WORDS IN SWITZERLAND

An alum in Switzerland has an innovative way to teach her students English and history.

JULIA WILKINS (’06) has been wowing parents of her third-grade Core Knowledge students at The American School in Switzerland (TASIS), with Professor Michael Aschliman, who sits on the TASIS Foundation Board and is the curriculum advisor for the organization. “She is an outstanding asset here,” Aschliman writes. “Her students, most of whom are nonnative English speakers, put on an absolutely ingenious oral presentation, with costumes and English recitations, that drew dozens of parents and teachers and astonished people with their English fluency.”

The theme of the presentation was a wax museum, Wilkins explains. Each student chose a historical figure and researched and wrote a one-minute speech about that person’s life and significance. One parent later told Wilkins about a family trip to Rome: “Her child had been Julius Caesar in the wax museum. She said the tour guide asked her to tell her son to be quiet because he kept interrupting the tour to give additional information he had learned from his project. It was pretty great to hear that.”

NEW FACULTY

This fall, SED is joined by eight new faculty members. Dean Hardin Coleman says the new hires are “eager to continue our mission of preparing outstanding teachers who will grow our capacity to produce research to refine educational practice in the 21st century.”

Donald J. Beaudette comes to SED as associate professor of the professional practice after spending 36 years leading rural, suburban, and urban schools and school districts in three different states, 24 of those years as a superintendent of schools. As coordinator of the Educational Leadership & Development Program, Beaudette is responsible for helping aspiring and new school leaders develop the skills and knowledge necessary to lead schools and school systems in rapidly changing and challenging environments. He works with schools and districts to identify, prepare, and mentor leaders for tomorrow’s schools, and plans and develops programs that respond to the needs of students in prekindergarten through grade 12 and beyond. He currently sits on the Board of Directors of the New England School Development Council.

Kathleen Corriereau joins SED as assistant professor. She received a bachelor’s degree in cognitive neuroscience from Brown University, a master’s in education from the University of Cambridge, and a doctorate in human development and psychology from Harvard University. Her research focuses on childhood social and cognitive development, with a focus on how children decide what people and
what information are trustworthy. She is also interested in language and reading development, as well as cross-cultural differences and the role of parenting in children’s social and emotional development.

Melissa K. Holt is an assistant professor in counseling psychology. Prior to joining SED, Holt was a behavioral scientist in the Division of Violence Prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Holt’s research focuses on youth experiences with violence in the home, school, and community, with a particular emphasis on bullying. Within this line of research, she has evaluated the overlap among violence exposures, factors that promote resilience among youth exposed to violence, and the efficacy of school-based violence prevention programs. Holt completed her predoctoral clinical internship at the University of Illinois at Chicago and has expertise in counseling clients with histories of trauma and in treating individuals diagnosed with eating disorders.

Kimberly Howard holds a bachelor’s degree from Johns Hopkins University and advanced degrees in counseling from Boston College. She completed a predoctoral clinical internship at the Outpatient Behavioral Health Center at Sinai Samaritan Medical Center in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Prior to joining the SED Counseling Program faculty, she ran a high school drop-out prevention program and was an assistant professor in the counseling psychology program at the University of Wisconsin—Madison. Howard’s research interests include the examination of the career development process of diverse, low-income youth. She is interested in factors that promote vocational development and resilience and the reasoning processes used by children and youth to understand career choice and career attainment.

"Many things about SED attracted Dr. Solberg, including our lab-based learning programs, [and the] professional development our faculty provide for practicing teachers.”

Devin Kearns is an SED assistant professor of special education. He received his doctorate at Vanderbilt University. Kearns has worked as an elementary school teacher, a reading specialist, a literacy coach, and a research associate. He has provided professional development and curriculum design for the University of California, Los Angeles, Vanderbilt University, and Teach For America. He has worked with teachers in school districts across the United States and Canada. For his doctorate, Kearns worked on a large-scale investigation of the supplemental reading program Peer-Assisted Learning Strategies (PALS) and a study of the cognitive causes of reading disability. Currently, he is working to understand the processes involved in multisyllabic word reading.

Zachary Rossetti is a former special education teacher and inclusion facilitator from New Hampshire. He was an assistant professor in the elementary/special education program at Providence College for four years before joining SED Special Education. His research emphasizes the sense of belonging experienced by people with disabilities, and it focuses on school and community inclusion, social relationships in schools, and augmentative and alternative communication methods. He is also interested in preservice teacher perceptions of disability (including disability), family/sibling experiences, autism, intellectual and developmental disabilities, and cultural representations of disability. His research focuses on students learn important algebraic concepts by participating in mathematical discussions with peers. For his dissertation (supported by the Spencer Foundation), Zahner analyzed how two groups of bilingual ninth graders engaged in mathematical discussions about slope, rate, and linear functions. Zahner, who joined SED as an assistant professor, earned his PhD in education from the University of California, Santa Cruz, where he was a fellow with the Center for the Mathematics Education of Latinos/as, an NSF Center for Learning and Teaching.

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V. Scott Solberg is SED’s associate dean for research and a faculty member in Educational Foundations, Leadership, and Counseling. He received his PhD in counseling psychology from the University of California, Santa Barbara. Solberg is an active member in the Society for Vocational Psychology in the American Psychological Association, the International Association for Educational and Vocational Guidance, and the National Career Development Association. He also serves on the editorial board of Career Development Quarterly and as an ad hoc reviewer for the Journal of Vocational Behavior and the Journal of Career Development. Solberg has published over 40 professional articles, chapters, monographs, and technical reports that focus on career development for youth, including how to promote optimal youth development and college and career readiness through the use of individualized learning plans and resiliency-based curriculum. “Many things about SED attracted Dr. Solberg,” says Dean Coleman, “including our lab-based learning programs, the amount of professional development our faculty provide for practicing teachers, and our excellent relationship with faculty in BU’s College of Arts & Sciences. He believes these programs will provide the basis for several productive and meaningful programs of research for junior and senior faculty.”

DOING MORE

A big wheel in cable television, this SED alumna teaches viewers about tolerance. By Rachel Johnson

WHENEVER I think you’ve done enough, Bonnie Hammer (COM’71, SED’75) knows you can always do more. Not satisfied with reversing the fortunes of two beleaguered cable stations, Sci-Fi (now Syfy) and USA, she transformed USA into the most-watched television station of 2010, created an awareness campaign against prejudice and, in January 2011, became the chair of NBC Universal Cable Entertainment and Cable Studios, earning responsibility for the stations’ vision as well as bringing new viewers. It’s worked. Under Hammer’s leadership, the “Characters Welcome” campaign and branding strategy turned a floundering USA into a ratings darling. It also helped guide development of the new programming that caused the ratings boom. The shows that USA has launched since Hammer took the helm, including Psych, about an offbeat detective who solves cases pretending to be a psychic, and Burn/Notice, in which a renegade spy is out for redemption, are all character-driven, and all have what she describes as a “blue-sky tone”—an upbeat feeling. Hopefulness, seeing the future in welcoming difference and change, drove her other character initiative at USA, “Characters United,” a public service website aimed at advancing acceptance and combating racism, discrimination, and intolerance. Hammer’s career began at Boston’s WGBH television station helping to produce the acclaimed The Old House, and over the past three decades, she has been president of Syfy, USA, and NBC Universal Cable Entertainment and Universal Cable Productions. As she told the trade magazine Broadcasting & Cable, “Somebody saying, ‘You can’t do that’ is what motivates me.”

Photo by Kevin Scanlon

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NEWS & NOTES | continued |

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

( 3 )
The School of Education hired Joan Dee (’59, ’73) as a dean’s assistant in 1970. She’s had “dean” in her title ever since, or at least until her retirement last May. As associate dean for most of that time, Dee has overseen admissions, licensure, academic standing, practicum placements, and student services for the School. She has sat on the Dean’s Cabinet and on the SED Academic Instruction and Standards Committee. Dee has been an active member of the SED Alumni Board, organizing timely, helpful mini-conferences that consistently draw more than 100 attendees. She was even acting dean of the School for a time.

Dee has been the recipient of an Honorary BU Scarlet Key Award, SED’s Ida M. Johnston Alumni Award, and the Pi Lambda Theta Excellence in Education Award.

Moreover, along with her longtime fellow associate dean, Boyd Dewey, who retired in 2009, Dee began several enduring SED traditions. “Every time I do the junior pinning or the senior robing or anything with the Education House, I’m always going to think of her,” says Director of Student Services Jackie Boyle (MET’07, ’14). “We’re so lucky because now we have these staples in our calendar that the students are really invested in and care about.”

The junior pinning, officially the Pinning and Affirmation Ceremony, annually honors juniors about to embark on their student teaching placements. At the ceremony, juniors stand before an audience of alumni and family and declare their commitment to the teaching profession by reciting the Boston University Educator’s Affirmation, a Hippocratic-style oath penned for the occasion by former faculty member Steven Tigner.

In her 41 years as associate dean, Joan Dee began traditions that will remain forever part of SED.

By Patrick L. Kennedy
Photograph by Winslow Martin

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION
“She played a large part in making that happen,” says Katie Matthews ('12). Dee coordinated the first ceremony in 1989 and she continued year after year to work with the SED under-graduate student government president, who serves as student speaker at the event.

More important, Dee worked with the alumni board to bring graduates young and old back to campus to show their support for the new teachers. “That was always an inspiring part of her involvement with the alumni board,” says Ryan Woods (‘05, ’06), president of the board. “She’s made it very student-focused, engaging alumni to bring them back for student programming, such as junior pinning and senior robing.”

Says Matthews, who emceed last year’s pinning, “It really marks the beginning of our career. It’s saying that BU and SED have confidence in our ability to be teachers, that they’re ready to send us into the field. And then to shake the hand of the president of the alumni board, of the community we’ll be visiting in just a very short time— it’s a very special moment. When I was there, making my affirmation, I had a tear in my eye.”

Dee also co-founded the modern Dean’s Hosts. The program had existed, but lapsed in the 1950s. “I found the old outfits in a closet” in the 1970s, she recalls. “We took them out, and then in a very short time decided to make new ones that were a little more up-to-date!”

The hosts play a vital admissions role by greeting prospective students and their parents. “They show people around the School and make arrangements if someone comes in and wants to talk to students or faculty.” The hosts are very active on “Day for the Class of,” Dee says, when SED welcomes accepted students. “They take a lot of care in making them feel a part of the School, and it’s always impressive to the students and their parents.”

As Dee was instrumental in establishing the Education House, one of BU’s first specialty residences. Now a home for 26 education majors, the brownstone on Bay State Road “was an elegant building, but it needed some work” the summer before it opened in 1990, Dee recalls. BU carpenters and other workmen were still putting the finishing touches on the renovation when students moved in that first fall. When work was complete, the students invited the construction crew members and their wives to dine with them at the house’s opening reception.

“He showed how our students were such good people and that they were good to everyone,” says Boyle. “Dean Dee always tells students that story to make sure they know they need to be kind and generous.”

Dee and Dewey, the students’ co-advisors, would regularly visit the house for dinners and other events. “It created a sense of closeness,” says Woods, who lived at the house from freshman through senior year. “There was a strong sense of community and collaboration.”

In October, SED unveiled a plaque at the “Ed House” honoring Dee and keeping her name visible to future generations of residents. Just as BU traditions and traditions will live on at SED, so too will Dee’s lessons and standards live on in the up-and-coming administrators and teachers who worked under her. “She was such a good mentor, I constantly sought her advice,” says Boyle, who as the Education House advisor now eats dinner with the students once a month.

“She’s such a consummate professional,” Boyle says. “She handled issues with plagiarism, academic misconduct—definitely more difficult aspects. But she was the woman for the job. She’s a tough person, and she knew how to deal with those things. “She paid incredible attention to detail, and she was so good at what she did. I always felt a need to get things right when I worked for her, and that sort of work ethic becomes contagious.”

Heather Kohn (’09, ’10), who worked in student services under Dee for five years, seconds that sentiment: “When you were in a meeting with her, you felt she’d do whatever it took to do whatever was best for the School and the students, and it was inspiring. I learned from her to be as committed as you can be to what you’re doing, to put 110 percent into your job, and to show students you care about them.”

Dee’s caring stand must not be taken for granted. “She cares about this School so much,” says Boyle, “and from a very unselfish place. She really, truly loves the students. If there was a student with a health issue or a family emergency, she would come into my office every hour to check in and see if there was any word. She cared about everybody at the School like they were her own children or grandchildren.”

As Dewey recounted at Dee’s retirement party in May, she once invited some international students to her home for Thanksgiving dinner. It was her first attempt at cooking turkey, and the result was a bird black on the outside and raw inside, but that didn’t matter. “It’s an indication of how big her heart is,” says Matthews. “She opened her home to these students who had nowhere to go for the holiday.”

“I’ve just been so happy with my life and my colleagues and the students,” Dee reflects. “I’ve heard from people I met early on in their careers who came back and said, ‘This was a good choice for me.’ It’s a pleasure to get a letter like that. And it’s a pleasure to work with the students of the School of Education, because they share my vision and the vision of the faculty. “And they’re fun, too!”

**NUMBER-ONE FAN**

Norman Dee is SED’s top Terrier.

It is impossible to talk about Joan Dee without mentioning her husband, Norman Dee (’54, SED ’56). He’s been a constant—and constantly cheerful—presence at his wife’s side, at SED alumni gatherings, and especially at Terriers athletic events. There have been Dees in Concord since the 19th century. Norman’s family runs the funeral home that handled the burial of Henry David Thoreau. “It cost thirty bucks, and I don’t think he ever paid it, the cheapskate,” Dee jokes.

Norman and Joan met at a roller-skating rink in the 1950s, and found they shared a passion for education. “I was lucky to have met somebody else who wanted to teach,” says Joan. Both taught in Concord public schools, and Norman went on to teach at Lesley University for 35 years.

In the years between his retirement and Joan’s, Norm had a daily routine. He rose with his wife early in the morning, breakfasted with her and friends at a local diner, drove to Boston, and dropped Joan off at SED. He would then attend Mass at the chapel at the Prudential building and go for a walk if weather permitted. The Dees would later meet for coffee, and after five o’clock he would often help her set up for alumni events.

Finally, most evenings, the couple would attend a Terriers game, especially hockey and basketball men’s and women’s. The Dees have been season-ticket holders for men’s ice hockey for the better part of four decades, and for most of that time they have also traveled for away games all over the Northeast. They still attend every home game at Agganis Arena. The athletics department even held a banquet to honor Norman Dee as the Boston University Terriers’ Number-One Fan. It’s not a surprising title for a deeply Massachusetts-rooted sports fan who worked at Fenway Park as a teenager, although that experience had a surprising effect on his loyalties. Ted Williams and company didn’t have the time of day for young Norm, but when the Bronx Bombers came to town, Norm found that “Joe DiMaggio, Mickey Mantle, and that whole team were the nicest guys and treated me great. That’s why I’m a Yankees fan!”

**DEE & DEWNEY BOOK AWARDS**

Students continue to benefit from the Joan Dee & Boyd Dewney Book Awards program, which grants 20 distinguished students a much-welcome credit at BU’s bookstore, the Barnes & Noble on Kenmore Square.

To learn more or make a donation, visit www.bu.edu/sed/alumni/giving/bookawards.

**She cares about this School so much,” says Boyle, “and from a very unselfish place. She really, truly loves the students.**
I discovered my enthusiasm for academic learning quite late. Even today, in his forties and pursuing a doctorate in curriculum and teaching at SED, Konstantinakos admits he likes “bringing the militant energy” to the field of education. Konstantinakos is an expert in culture and language education. A fluent Japanese speaker, he harnesses the pencil wrecker within to produce textbooks and educational media that “shift students from consumption to production,” giving them the power to change something they care about.

Konstantinakos is an educator, he aims to “act more like a facilitator.” A new website to accompany ABCs of Japanese will allow students to upload their own videos and slideshows—a kind of “youth-tube,” says Konstantinakos—producing cross-cultural empathy might sound a touch lofty, but it gets back to Konstantinakos’s reason for teaching: “I like to see students working at their best and also doing something that is of some benefit to others.”

With two decades of anecdotal success behind him, Konstantinakos is ready to share his methods with other teachers. And that’s why he’s back in his hometown studying at SED. Just because an approach worked in tiny Toho doesn’t mean people will risk it in a city like Tokyo or Los Angeles. Konstantinakos knows that he needs to quantify his results, if his methods are to gain traction on a larger scale.

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Ethics for Eighth Graders

Three Boston charter schools are teaching integrity, perseverance, and other character traits along with academic skills. Is it working?

IT’S 9:30 A.M. ON A TYPICAL TUESDAY, AND A GROUP of eighth graders is discussing the philosophical ideas of Thrasymachus and the fall of Yertle the Turtle. The former is a Greek sophist and a character in Plato’s Republic who unsuccessfully argued that “justice is the advantage of the stronger”—or, in plainer terms, that might makes right. The latter is a Dr. Seuss character, an oppressive turtle king who commands his fellow turtles to provide him a throne by stacking themselves beneath him. (The turtle tower eventually topples, of course, and Yertle floundering in the mud.)

This is ethical philosophy class, a fundamental component of the curriculum at the Boston Preparatory Charter Public School. Established in 2004 in Boston’s Hyde Park neighborhood, the school emphasizes scholarship, personal growth, and five moral virtues: courage, compassion, integrity, perseverance, and respect. Thrasymachus and Yertle figured into a lesson on the virtue of respect. Similar lessons use the memoirs of Gandhi and the stories of Martin Luther King Jr. as a way to teach respect and to distinguish between true courage and mere bravado.

Boston Prep, with its weekly ethics class and its community meetings in which students receive value commendations for good behavior, is among a growing number of urban schools that focus on character education. This is a significant change from earlier decades, when the primary focus of education was on academic skills. Now students at Stanford University are exploring the possibility of opening a similar shelter near their campus in Palo Alto, California.

STUDY SPARKS REAL-WORLD CHANGES

Seider's book inspires homeless shelter launch

In December 2010, Scott Seider discussed his book, Shelter: Where Harvard Meets the Homeless, on National Public Radio's Here and Now. In the book, Seider explains how the student-run Harvard Square Homeless Shelter provides transformative experiences for the B.U. and other area students who volunteer there as well as for its homeless guests, and he argues that the shelter's model could—and should—be replicated in other U.S. cities. Stephanie Sena, a history professor at Villanova University, heard the NPR interview and got in touch.

In November, they used what they learned to launch the Student-Run Emergency Housing Unit of Philadelphia, which houses 30 homeless men and draws student volunteers from Villanova, Drexel, Temple, Swarthmore, and other Philadelphia-area colleges. Now students at Stanford University are exploring the possibility of opening a similar shelter near their campus in Palo Alto, California.

Seider is thrilled to see his research and writing achieve such concrete results. "That was the goal," he says, "but that it actually happened and happened pretty fast—that’s incredibly exciting to me."
community meeting is the awarding of the “Spirit Stick” to a student who embodies the school’s ten virtues: scholarship, integrity, dignity, responsibility, perseverance, community, leadership, peace, social justice, and investment. While all ten virtues are important at Bishop Brany, says Seider, “in truth, their character education initiatives are deeply focused on perseverance and academic performance.”

Lessons during the students’ twice-weekly advisory periods, he says, often feature examples of people who persevered to succeed: students who watch a television commercial in which athletes discuss the training required to win, or they listen to a speech by President Barack Obama in which he notes the thousands of failed tests Thomas Edison ran before finding the right materials for his lightbulb. Friday’s community meetings often include opportunities for students to showcase their academic excellence, from contexts to see who can memorize the most digits of pi to “public speaking extravaganzas” that allow students to earn prizes for their memorization and presentation skills.

Academy of the Pacific Rim in Hyde Park, which enrolls 500 students in grades five through twelve, employs philosophies from Eastern and Western culture to inspire students to excel and to help them appreciate their civic responsibilities to their school, their city, their country, and their world. Students perform community service in Boston and beyond, study Mandarin Chinese, take a twelfth-grade civics class, and have opportunities to travel to China as exchange students. The school’s culture revolves around two Japanese words: gambatte and kōtoku. Gambatte implies persistence and doing one’s best: students are people I can ask for help when I need it.”

After gathering binders-full of survey and observational data, Seider spent the summer of 2011 sifting through that information and comparing it to the records of the three schools provided on students’ grades and behavior. He plans to continue analyzing the data and expects it to yield several magazine articles and academic papers and a full-length book. In the meantime, he says, he can share top-line conclusions he’s already made from his research. The most basic of these conclusions: intense focus on character education actually works. Seider’s survey results show that students do make gains in the character traits their schools emphasize—and they make the largest gains in the areas their schools focus on most intensely.

“You can see the effects of different types of interventions,” Seider says. “And I think that really puts the onus on schools to be reflective about what they want to achieve.”

Surveys show that students do make gains in the character traits their schools emphasize—and they make the largest gains in the areas their schools focus on most intensely. “You can see the effects of different types of interventions,” Seider says. “And I think that really puts the onus on schools to be reflective about what they want to achieve.”

Seider’s second group of findings comes from comparing character-survey results with records of students’ grades, demerits for misbehavior, and commendations/merits for good behavior. The combined data from all three schools reveal that specific character traits are strong predictors of student outcomes. The character trait strongly associated with grades is perseverance (students with the highest perseverance scores also have the highest grades). The trait associated with demerits is integrity (students with higher integrity get fewer demerits). The trait that predicts commendations/merits is a sense of community connection.

The relationship between perseverance and academic achievement, says Seider, is no surprise: plenty of past research has shown that performance character traits such as perseverance and self-discipline are more important than IQ as predictors of academic success, and many schools have therefore begun incorporating performance character education into their curricula. The findings about integrity and community connection, however, have Seider excited.

“If you think of school culture as incredibly important to creating an environment where powerful teaching and learning can happen, then clearly you want a school environment where misbehavior is low and positive behaviors are high,” he says. “The strongest predictor of misbehavior is low integrity, a moral character trait. The best predictor of commendable behavior is a sense of connectedness, which you could describe as a civic character trait. That’s where I’m really interested—in this idea that moral and civic character traits have a real role to play in creating a school culture where learning can take place.”

To back up his gut feeling that better learning happens in better classroom environments, Seider crunched his numbers and found a direct correlation between students’ academic grades and being in classes in which teachers issue few demerits. As an advocate of civic and moral character education in a country in which test scores and academic performance often reign supreme, Seider is pleased to have solid evidence that teaching compassion and character has a place in the classroom alongside pronouns, Pythagoras, and perseverance. 

“One of the things that I think is really interesting is how often people talk about the connection. I think it’s actually really strong predictors of student outcomes. The combined data from all three schools reveal that specific character traits are strong predictors of student outcomes. The character trait strongly associated with grades is perseverance (students with the highest perseverance scores also have the highest grades). The trait associated with demerits is integrity (students with higher integrity get fewer demerits). The trait that predicts commendations/merits is a sense of community connection.

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“Making Gains in the Workplace”

An SED program helps adult English learners succeed at work.

MARIA ECHAVARRIA (right) received a congratulatory hug from ESL teacher Kristen Bock after completing SED’s Workplace Literacy Program, an initiative of the Donald Durrell Reading and Writing Clinic. Over the course of ten weeks, the program offers 40 hours of English language and literacy to adult employees of Boston University Divinity Services. Bock plans the curriculum along with Professor Joanne Paratore (’83) and Intergenerational Literacy Program Director Barbara Krol-Sinclair (’82, ’96). They focus on improving vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, reading, and writing skills.

For content, they use topics of interest and importance to the students, both in and out of the workplace. Bock leads the classes with the help of SED students who serve as literacy tutors. The Workplace Literacy Program began last year, and Bock and colleagues have seen enrollees make notable gains in literacy proficiency, based on the results of written and oral tests given at the beginning and end of the course. The supervisors of nearly all 16 students who completed the course, Bock says, wrote that their employees “showed great gains in terms of confidence, ability to communicate in English; customer service, and competency.”

“The results are totally outstanding.” The above photo was taken at the program’s high-energy graduation ceremony, to which teachers and students bring family members, food, and their dancing shoes. “Maria came both semesters, so I got to know her really well,” says Bock. “She just got done giving a thank-you speech, in English, in front of everyone, including her supervisors. I was so proud of her.” —PK
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