

DARA FELDMAN: Would you like to bring more joy, meaning, and purpose back into teaching and learning? Do you want to decrease power struggles and increase student achievement? Then I invite you to join me as I share about how the Virtues Project empowers individuals to live more authentic meaningful lives, families to raise responsible and respectful children, educators to create safe, caring, and high performing learning communities, and leaders to encourage excellence and ethics in the work place. Hi, my name is Dara Feldman and I will be your guide as we explore the five strategies of the Virtues Project, for bringing out the best in ourselves and others.

I first found out about the project after being honored as Disney's 2005 Outstanding Elementary Teacher of the Year. I asked David Vixie, the Overall Disney Teacher of the Year, what in his repertoire most spoke to him and he pulled out a small business card with a list of the virtues and a website. I was instantly drawn to the power of seeing these character qualities listed all together that I knew that this was the project that I had been looking for my entire 25 years in education. As a National Board Certified Teacher and the mother of two teenagers, I am here to tell you that the five strategies of the Virtues Project not only transformed my life professionally but also personally. When I was first introduced to the Virtues Project my children were twelve and fifteen and sibling rivalry was at an all time high. I was successfully using these strategies at school with my kindergarteners and experiencing joy, peace, and purpose in our classroom. However, as soon as I opened the front door of my home, I started losing it with my own children. Then I remembered that when Linda, one of the founders of the Virtues Project was on Oprah, Oprah said of the Families Virtues Guides that "Parents are always saying children don't come with a guide book, this is one. This helps you get them on the right track for leading a good life." I don't know about you, but my children didn't come with an instruction manual. So after reading the Family Guide, I began using the strategies in my own home and there was instant transformation. Oftentimes as educators, we participate in professional development that can only be used at school. What makes the Virtues Project Unique is that it is not an add-on curriculum. There was no white binder. Just five strategies that can be used to enhance all areas of your life.

Now let's hear from two Baltimore high school teachers about how the project has transformed their lives as well as their school community.

TAMMY: The reason that Virtues Project resonated with me was because I was in my sixteenth year of teaching and I was feeling a little bit burned out and learning about the Virtues Project changed my life not only professionally but also personally. It allowed me to have better relationships with my students and allowed me to look for the positive where I was at a point where I could only see the negatives. I could only focus on the students that were acting out. I didn't spend the time that I needed to with the students who really wanted to learn. It allowed me to change the way that I communicated with my students. It helped me tremendously with my classroom management.

NANCY: And one of the things besides what Tammy just talked about the Virtues Project and relationships and how it improves communication skills on a personal

level as well as professional, it also is about the climate of our building. Who does not want a more compassionate, peaceful, friendly, kind working environment? I think one of the things with the Virtues Project is that it gives us the ability to do that.

DARA FELDMAN: The Virtues Project was founded twenty years ago by Dr. Dan Popov, a pediatric psychologist and a scholar. His wife, Linda Kavelin Popov, a psychiatric social worker, community developer, spiritual caregiver in hospice and an author as well as Linda's younger brother, John Kavelin, who at the time was a Disney Imagineer. They were having brunch at the Empress Hotel and talking about the state of the world and how tragic it was that youth ages fifteen to twenty-four were killing each other. So they felt compelled to do something. In a Harvard study they found the number one reason that youth randomly commit acts of murder was boredom. Not the kind of boredom where kids have nothing to do on a summer's day but a lack of meaning and purpose. The founders researched all the cultures, oral traditions and sacred texts of the world. What they found that was common to all of humanity were the virtues. Knowing that we are all born with these virtues within us and potential, they came up with Five Strategies and a Family Guide to help parents to awaken the virtues within their children. They self-published the Family Guide and in less than two months the book spread to over twenty countries by word of mouth. Now the Virtues project is in over ninety-five countries and was honored by the United Nations as a model global program for all cultures and is endorsed by the Dalai Lama. It is used by individuals, families, schools, faith based organizations, businesses, and communities. Testimonials from schools around the world have demonstrated how the five strategies of the Virtues Project bring out the best in both students and educators. The drop out rate decreases and attendance increases because the students feel safe, valued, and connected. Student achievement increases because students have higher authentic self esteem and embrace 21st century skills integrating excellence in academics and ethics. Discipline referrals decrease because students feel heard and do not need to act out for attention. Bullies are often transformed into leaders learning to apply their power with compassion and responsibility. Professional learning communities and home/school connections are strengthened when adults speak the language of virtues and companion one another. The overall climate of the school is more peaceful and joyful resulting in less stress for everyone allowing both students and staff to thrive.

Before we delve into the five strategies, let's hear again from our teachers, Tammy and Nancy as well as one of their students, Annette, to share their experience benefiting tremendously from the Virtues Project.

NANCY: Anytime anyone can make a connection with a child, learning improves, attendance improves, behavior improves. The Virtues Project is a very easy way to make that connection with anyone. Especially with a child in your room. And it happens naturally. We know, we all know as educators, that connection is the key and if a child feels valued in your room then they are going to learn more. If they are dehumanized in your room, then we can destroy them instead of uplift them. We have been able to do that with the virtues.

TAMMY: For me, and I am sure most of the other teachers that have a virtues classroom or teach virtues, because I've change the way I communicate with my students I have cut down tremendously on the conflicts that I have, instead of saying "sit down", or "get out", not that I would use that term all the time, but I have learned how to communicate with students so that I don't get to that point. For me, if I can cut down on the number of conflicts that I have in my class and another teacher can cut down on the number of conflicts just through the way that we communicate with students, then definitely it makes an impact on discipline. If students are here and they feel valued, again just to reiterate what Nancy said, they are going to come to school. They are going to want to be in my class. They are not going to cut my class because they feel safe there and they feel like they are being acknowledged and they are valued.

ANNETTE: You also had to think about self discipline and like between peers. Because there are times when we are in the hallway, going from class to class, seeing as though we only have five minutes to get from one end of the building to another. It can be really really frustrating. At the beginning of the school year before the Virtues Project was really big in this school, you would hear things like "move, get out of my way, what are you doing?" You know, negative statements. As Virtues was introduced to the students and was being used more and more, statements changed and they became "Could you please be more considerate when you're walking down the hallway, can you take that conversation aside maybe." It really does affect the way the person is going to react. Instead of having like a negative conflict in the hallway trying to get from one class to the next, it is a constructive conversation and you're building on each other. You know, "Please be more considerate" and the next time when somebody moves, or you know, adjusts themselves so that you can get to your class, the statements become "thank you, that was very kind of you." These are all virtue statements. They might not have the specific format that we are taught but that was just a guideline and now we are able to adapt it and use it in a more natural way.

DARA FELDMAN: Now that you have an awareness of the impact the Virtues Project can make. Let's take a look at the virtues and the five strategies.

To help you gain a deeper understanding of each strategy you may want to download the attached handouts to use as we move through this overview. Here is a list of 52 virtues. You can also refer to page 3 of your handouts for this list. Oftentimes people confuse virtues and values so I want to clarify the definitions for you now. Virtues are universal positive qualities of character agreed upon by all cultures. Values can be personal, culture, or group-specific. They are things people deem important or of value and may not even be positive or qualities of character. For example, people can value things like money, time, family, or power.

Let's take a look at the list of virtues again and think about which one is a strength virtue for you. A strength virtue is a virtue that is well developed in you. How does your strength virtue show up in your life? Now take a look at the list and identify a virtue which is your growth virtue. A growth virtue is one that you would like to have more of. How would strengthening your growth virtue make a difference in your life?

How does it feel to take a moment to reflect on your own virtues? What benefits do you think it would have for your students to reflect on their virtues?

Now that you are familiar with the virtues let's take a look at the five strategies. You may wish to refer to page 4 of your handout.

Strategy 1 is speaking the language of the virtues. Language has power to inspire or to discourage. Using virtues to acknowledge, guide, correct and thank awakens the best within us. The second strategy, recognizing teachable moments, is about recognizing the virtues needed in daily challenges which help us to become lifelong learners open to the lessons of character. The third strategy is setting clear boundaries. Boundaries based on respect and restorative justice create a climate of peace, cooperation, and safety in our homes, schools, and communities. Honoring the spirit is the fourth strategy. We sustain our vision and purpose by integrating virtues into our activities surrounding celebrations and the arts. The final strategy is companionship. Being deeply present and listening with compassionate curiosity guides others to find clarity and to create their own solutions. It supports healing and growth.

Do you believe that language has the power to inspire or discourage? Think about a time in your life when words built you up or left you feeling hurt and deflated. Language does have the power to inspire or discourage. There are four basic ways to use the power of language to awaken character and bring out the best in others. They are to acknowledge, guide, correct, and thank. Using virtues language inspires the development of character. We nurture authentic self esteem when we replace shaming or blaming language by naming virtues such as kindness, respect, or peacefulness.

Now let's learn how to speak the language of virtues in order to empower others and support ourselves. The language of the virtues has three elements. They include the opening phrase, a virtue, and how the virtue is being applied in a situation or the evidence you see being exhibited. Here is an example. "I see your diligence in the way you worked through that difficult math problem without giving up." "I see" is the stem or the opening phrase. "Diligence" is the virtue. "In the way you worked through that difficult math problem without giving up" is the evidence or the way the virtue is being applied. As educators we are taught to give timely and specific feedback. When we use the language of virtues we are able to give timely, specific, and meaningful feedback. Oftentimes you might say "you did a great job." However, the student is left wondering what was great. Take a look at this video clip to see the difference between an ordinary acknowledgement and a virtues acknowledgement.

TEACHER: Ladies and gentlemen, what I am passing back to you right now are the quizzes that you guys took on The Crucible, and I must say your scores were very good. You did a good job.

Class, the last two weeks we have spent reading The Crucible and looking over these quiz grades I really want to acknowledge the purposefulness that you guys have been showing in class. You have been volunteering. You have been doing all of your

homework. You have been helping each out with some things that maybe other students are having trouble with and that really showed on these quiz grades. You guys did an excellent job.

Josh, I really admire your diligence in catching up with all the reading. You did a great job on that test.

THE POWER OF A VIRTUES ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

How did it feel different as opposed to just a "good job" and then how she acknowledged you guys for your purposefulness and gave the evidence? Was there a difference for you?"

STUDENT: I think it is a difference because it is like gives us encouragement to work harder than what we usually do. Instead of doing our quiz grades and saying "Oh, we probably failed it anyway", it probably gives us confidence to say "Oh, we probably passed it and we can leave." Excel!"

STUDENT: I think it actually tells us that she took time to read our work and understand what we did and actually appreciate the time and effort that we spent in taking the test.

DARA FELDMAN: Take a minute to reflect on what you saw. What was different? What did you notice? A virtues correction is after a mistaken behavior has occurred. When you correct behavior by focusing on a virtue you are modeling assertiveness rather than aggression. You are naming the act rather than the actor. You are showing justice rather than shaming and blaming. You eliminate humiliation which sometimes leads to violence. Holding a student accountable for their actions in a firm respectful way and in the context of their ability to choose virtues is an open invitation to do the right thing. One of the things you can do back in the classroom is to thank your students by naming a specific virtue they have shown especially when it has been helpful to you. Naming virtues while thanking gives the students insight into what is already within them. "Thank you for your helpfulness in taking the attendance to the office" is an example of using virtues to thank a student. Speaking the language of virtues may feel awkward at first. However with practice and authentic use, the language flows more naturally. You will quickly see a positive effect. The best way to practice the language of the virtues so that you can be fluent in speaking the language and being able to witness the virtues in others is by doing a virtues pick on a daily basis. Virtues cards are tools that describe, define, and give specific ways to practice each virtue. Picking a virtues card on a daily basis and reflecting on whether it is an invitation, affirmation or both helps to strengthen your own virtues and thus becomes a lens by which you view others. Finally, modeling is a prerequisite to excellence when using the virtues language.

The second strategy of the Virtues Project is recognizing teachable moments. Recognizing the virtues needed in daily challenges helps us to become lifelong learners

open to the lessons of character. Students do not necessarily need special classes on character; in fact it is best if most of their lessons on virtues occur within the context of daily learning and living. Turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones by taking personal responsibility to clear up mistakes, by being open to learning from challenges and by replacing shaming with naming virtues. Always remember that humility is the goal, not humiliation. Recognizing the virtues needed in daily challenges helps us to become lifelong learners open to the lessons of character. There are two simple ways for you to recognize teachable moments. One is to acknowledge effort shown when students show any sign of using a virtue that is needed. For example: "Thomas you are very orderly this morning and kept the water in the water table." Two, you can remind or call a student to accountability for a virtue that is needed. Here is an example. "Thomas, what will help you remember to be orderly and keep the water in the water table?" Now think of the student whose behavior pushes your buttons. What is the virtue underlying that behavior and what virtue do they need to call on to balance things out. Take a moment to rename and reframe the behavior that gets under your skin.

The third strategy of the Virtues Project is setting clear boundaries. Clear virtues based boundaries based on respect, restorative justice and reparation provide a positive approach to school wide discipline and create climate of peace and safety. Personal boundaries protect our time and our energy. Think about the difference in your classroom when you set boundaries and when you don't set boundaries. Traditionally a teacher is a detective asking about the crime. In the ideal process of restorative justice, students take responsibility for what they do in order to make restitution which results in reconciliation which is to make friends again, which restores the relationship and restores the offender to the community. There are four steps to the restorative justice process. Number one is to ask all involved what happened. Use how and what questions, not why. Number two: ask what virtue was missing to create the conflict. Number three is to ask what it would look like if they had used the virtue that was missing and finally ask how they can make amends. One of the things needed in a discipline system based on restorative justice are some clear ground rules. Having these ground rules in place is an important way to create a safe haven and reduce the anxiety students may feel in a classroom where the boundaries are not clear. What you will find on page 8 of your handouts are 10 guidelines for effectively setting classroom boundaries as well as a sample classroom promise. It is a good idea to work with your students to create your class ground rules in order to achieve buy-in. After you have determined the ground rules, it is a good idea to post them where they can be referred to easily. Take a minute to think about your class rules. Do they include virtues? If not, how can you reword them to include virtues? What difference do you think that would make? Lets take a look at the video to see how the staff and students at Kenwood High School used virtues to make their PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention System) tenets more meaningful.

NANCY: Okay, so PBIS, we had what we called Kenwood Tenets which were the guidelines that our students were going to follow in our building. They were by our acronym BLUE, it was like be prepared, live responsibly... and what ended up happening was it was very difficult to remember those terms and those rules so as a virtues

committee we decided to try and rewrite those tenets based on virtues. Annette's going to talk about what virtues we chose.

ANNETTE: At the time before when first started talking about this we did not even know what our tenets were. It was funny because before we would ask our tenets, I was surveyed, a lady came into the school and surveyed the students in our class and she asked us what our tenets were and none of us knew what it was but because I read a lot of stuff I knew what they were. It was be there and prepared, live responsibly, U I can't remember, E was like, I don't know--at the time I had remembered. I have forgotten now. And since it was something that no one even really knew was there and it was just a poster that kind of hung on the wall, we came up with words that, you know, are common words and words that the students could relate to better. We talked about beauty being the first thing, talking about the individual and the environment. Like, Rebecca, I remember she had something to say about the beauty when we were actually talking about it.

REBECCA: Yes, yes I did. Beauty. What to say about beauty? Beauty can be found in some of the most unusual places. You can find beauty in some of the people that you would never think are beautiful like people that are different, the gothic people. You never know what they have gone through, where they have been, what they can do as a person. People just look at them on the outside and be like "oh that is not beautiful, that is hideous." But people might have a beautiful soul. Beauty is something that you can find anywhere, and stuff like that. I think that that was a good start for our BLUE. I think that was a good virtue to use because not a lot of people try to find the beauty in others they just try to find the bad and not look at the good, which is what the Virtues Group stands for. Looking at the good in everything.

DARA FELDMAN: In this climate of academic rigor, oftentimes we forget about meaning and purpose which is central to education. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development's Whole Child Commission Report provides the impetus for educators, policy makers, parents, community leaders, and other stake holders to change the conversation about learning and schooling from reforming its structures to transforming its conditions so that each child can develop his strengths and restore his unique capacities for intellectual, social, emotional, physical, and spiritual learning. The report calls on us to design learning environments that weave together the threads that connect not only math, science, the arts and humanities but also mind, heart, body, and spirit. Connections that tend to be fragmented in our current approach.

The very purpose of the fourth strategy of the Virtues Project, honoring the spirit, is to create a school environment that nurtures the whole child and helps strengthen school spirit. The most empowering way to create a safe, caring, respectful, and joyful learning environment is not only to require it but to inspire it. We can inspire meaning and mastery as well as enthusiastic loyalty to our school or organization in many ways such as through our daily routines, traditions, celebrations, the arts, nature, service learning, and daily virtues picks. The definition of spirituality for the Virtues Project is that which gives meaning and purpose to one's life. As educators it is imperative that we take care of ourselves so we can be there to support our students as well as our own

families. Do you take the time each day to enjoy something that is meaningful and joyful to you? Even if it is only going for a ten minute walk in nature or listening to music that you enjoy as you're driving home from work. Think about how you honor your own spirit as well as the spirit of your class and your family. Have you ever had a bad day or perhaps just wanted to share something that was going on for you and have the other person just listen? However, that person who was supposed to be listening starts giving you advice. How does that make you feel? I know for me it makes me really frustrated and angry. First of all I feel as if the person giving me advice thinks I can't handle the situation for myself, in addition most of the time I just want someone to listen.

Well, the fifth strategy of the Virtues Project, offer companionship, is about being deeply present and listening with open curiosity while guiding others to find clarity and to create their own solutions. It supports healing and growth. There are seven steps in offering companionship and they are spelled out on pages 10 and 11 of your handout. You don't always need to use all of these strategies but when you are taking the time to companion someone, particularly in grief, or with a moral dilemma, these are the aspects of the process. When strong feelings arise, or a problem needs to be solved, the educator listens with caring and attachment asking what and how questions that empower students to get to the heart of the matter and then supports them to resolve the situation by calling on their own understanding and closes with a virtues acknowledgement. Take a look at the comparison of what companionship is and what it is not. This tool can be used with anyone but it is particularly meaningful in mentoring the development of character.

Now that you have had the opportunity to explore the five strategies of the Virtue Project, I encourage you to refer to your handouts for additional activities and resources to help you get started using these strategies in your own teaching practice. In addition, I invite you to check out my web site www.heartofeducation.net for more ideas and detailed information about the Virtues Project including how to purchase materials such as the Virtues Project Educators Guide, cards, and posters as well as information about Virtues Project Professional Development and family outreach opportunities.

Let's hear a final thought from Annette, one of our idealistic student leaders, as she shares how the Virtues Project supports the Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan's, Civil Mission.

ANNETTE: I personally have been fortunate enough to be on the Board of Education for Baltimore County this year and the reason I bring that up is because I went to this summit in San Diego. And one of the key points that Secretary of Education, Arne Duncan, brought up was bringing back the civil missions in school. What he pointed out was the fact that the school systems have become so test centric that we've lost the fact that we're trying to produce strong citizens in the state. The funny thing to me was that when I was talking to my, I would say, colleagues at the summit, one of the things that I said was, Not even as a Baltimore county board member or as whatever positions I may carry, I said as a student at a public high school we are already doing this because we have the Virtues Project. With the Virtues we're creating individuals who are caring and compassionate and who can go out in to the world and use these, implement these virtues

statements and Virtues. To just become a better person because of it and change the atmosphere, their atmosphere. What the Virtues Project has done is empower each individual and we all have the ability to decide what type of environment we have around us. We have decided that we want a positive environment. Which is why we do the Virtues everywhere we go. That's the civic mission. That's the mission that we should have in our school systems. That's what we really need to teach the students. We really need to teach them that going out in the world isn't about being the smartest student, it isn't about being valedictorian. It's about you being an individual who changes your environment but your household, your community, your state, your country.

DARA FELDMAN: In this overview you have learned to create a culture of character and connect more deeply with your students. Utilizing these strategies will transform the climate of your school community into one that is more peaceful and joyful resulting in less stress for everyone and allowing staff and students to thrive. I could only share a little bit about the Virtues Project with you in this short time we had together. Though I could only scratch the surface, I hope you have found the information valuable enough to check out our website at www.heartofeducation.net.