

Thema: Education in Britain and America

24-hour job?**Values Education Also Tests Teachers**

BY LAUREL SHAPER WALTERS

THE old axiom that educators should practice what they preach is being tested anew across the nation.

As support for character education grows and expectations for student conduct rise, teachers also are being held accountable for their behavior.

In some cases, however, teachers view the new demands as clashing with their constitutional rights.

In Collinsville, Ill., the teachers union is protesting a new policy on obscene language that calls on teachers to serve as "positive role models" and "ambassadors for the school district." The union chafes at the "vague" policy especially because it's not clear if it applies after school hours.

In Santa Ana, Calif., teachers balk at having to wear suits and dresses after a tough dress code is put in place for students.

Moral education is streaking back to the top of many education wish lists. In a recent survey of parents "teaching children values and discipline" ranked as the No. 1 priority for education.

Now teachers are being told not only to teach morals, but to model good behavior.

One of the basic principles of character education is that teachers should serve as good examples for students. But what does this heightened accountability mean for teachers' rights to freedom of speech and conduct?

Few teachers dispute school districts' right to police teacher behavior or language in school, but many view their responsibilities as confined to what takes place on school grounds.

Requiring teachers to live up to a high moral standard 24-hours a day is unrealistic – and requires almost angelic behavior from people already taxed by shrinking budgets and ballooning class sizes, teachers argue. It also sets a standard, they say, that many parents may not meet.

"It's one thing to convey certain values," says Michael Resnick, associate executive director at the National School Boards Association in Alexandria, Va. "It's another thing to hold a teacher to an exemplary lifestyle around those values. That's where it starts getting a little trickier."

Annotation: 1. 70 off-color sexually offensive, obscene

The focus on teachers' behavior is nothing new. In early America, when the twin objectives of schooling were clearly understood as developing both character and intellect, teachers were hired more for their moral reputations than education credentials, says Thomas Lickona, author of "Educating for Character" and an expert on character education. "It's really a return to something that was present at the beginning of American public education."

As public schools embrace character education again, it makes sense that teachers are being scrutinized more closely as moral exemplars, he says.

In providing character education training, Lickona finds that high school teachers are more uncomfortable about their position as role models than elementary teachers. "The typical elementary school teacher is more comfortable being held to ethical standards," he says.

It may seem that younger kids need more help developing their moral compasses, but Lickona warns "adolescents are very astute in noticing any kind of double standard."

David Wheeler, principal of Wellwood Middle School in upstate New York, can vouch for that. When he began detaining or suspending students caught swearing several years ago, students started coming to his office after hearing a teacher use off-color language. "I got sent to the office for that, but how come the teacher can say it?" they would ask.

"They can't," Mr. Wheeler responds. "You can't say one thing and do another," he tells his teachers. "Kids need good role models. In a lot of cases, they're not getting that at home." But even some advocates of character education warn school districts about going too far in dictating their teachers' conduct. Just about every teacher contract includes some clause about "upholding the norms and values of the community," says James Leming, a professor of education at Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. "But if you start having a separate clause for every dimension of teacher behavior, it becomes pretty nit-picky."

(Shortened from **THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR**, Nov 7-13, 1997; 637 words)

Questions on the text

- 1 Explain the meaning of the headline. 10
2 What does Thomas Lickona mean by his reference to the "beginning of American public education" (ll. 51-52)? 10

Composition

- 3 Must teachers be perfect role models? Discuss. (Write about 150 to 200 words.) 40

Translation

- 4 Translate lines 56 to 84 into idiomatic German ("In providing ..." – end). 40
100

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24-hour job?

Values Education Also Tests Teachers

Suggested Solutions

1. The headline "Values Education Also Tests Teachers" refers to the newly discovered importance of values education at American schools. Teaching children about values is becoming more and more important to parents of American schoolchildren, and thus all the teachers are expected not only to theorize about morals, but also to act as role models. The headline suggests that this expectation can be a considerable strain on the teachers.
2. Thomas Lickona's reference to the "beginning of American public education" means that it has always been a tradition with America's schools to set great store by the teaching of moral values. More than two hundred years ago, it was even more important for a teacher to be considered morally upright than intellectually able, although both character and intellect were supposed to be trained at school.
3. (Example)

At the present time, it is becoming fashionable again to expect teachers to be perfect role models for their pupils. Many people think teachers ought to conform to this expectation, but I do not see it this way.

On the one hand, it would make sense for teachers to be role models because they are often a kind of idol for the pupils – at least for the younger ones. Consequently, the teachers should show them how important tolerance, charity and other values are in life. Such ethical values are crucial for the development of the children, and many pupils do not experience these values at home. In this respect, it would be highly desirable if teachers were perfect role models.

On the other hand, it is almost impossible for teachers to be perfect, because nobody is perfect. Thus it would be inhuman to expect supernatural behaviour of these people who want to live their private life, too.

To sum up and make a final point, teachers can't be perfect, but by trying to do a good job they already are a kind of role model because they prove that you can achieve something if you apply yourself, stick to your principles and are tolerant to others and towards yourself.
4. Wenn Lickona Fortbildungskurse in Charakterbildung hält, stellt er fest, dass sich High-School-Lehrer in ihrer Rolle als Vorbild weniger wohlfühlen als Grundschullehrer. „Dem typischen Grundschullehrer macht es weniger aus, an ethischen Grundsätzen gemessen zu werden“, sagt er.

Man könnte meinen, dass jüngere Kinder mehr Hilfen brauchen, um ihre moralische Orientierung zu entwickeln, aber Lickona warnt: „Heranwachsende sind sehr aufmerksam, wenn es darum geht, irgendeine Art von Doppelmoral zu entdecken.“

David Wheeler, Leiter der Wellwood Middle School im Norden von New York, kann das nur bestätigen. Als er vor etlichen Jahren damit anfang, Schüler, die man beim Fluchen erwischt hatte, mit Arrest oder Ausschluss zu bestrafen, kamen die Schüler bald auch in sein Büro, wenn sie einen Lehrer obszöne Ausdrücke benutzen gehört hatten. „Mich hat man dafür zu ihnen ins Büro geschickt, wie kommt's, dass der Lehrer es sagen darf?“, fragten sie dann.

„Sie dürfen es nicht“, antwortet Mr. Wheeler. „Sie können nicht so reden und dann anders handeln“, sagt er seinen Lehrern. „Kinder brauchen gute Vorbilder. In vielen Fällen bekommen sie zu Hause eben keins.“ Aber sogar manche Befürworter der Charakterbildung warnen die Schulbezirke davor, in der Festlegung des Verhaltens ihrer Lehrer zu weit zu gehen. So gut wie jeder Lehrervertrag enthält eine Klausel über „Achtung der Normen und Werte der Gemeinschaft“, sagt James Leming, Professor für Erziehung an der Southern Illinois University in Carbondale. „Aber wenn man damit anfängt, für jeden Bereich des Lehrerverhaltens eine eigene Klausel zu definieren, dann wird das ganz schön erbsenklauberisch.“

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