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Building Moral Intelligence One Piece at a Time

The Staff of Queen Elizabeth School,
Saskatoon

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Table of Contents

Foreword	2
Historical Perspective	3
The Present	5
Research Data	6
Conclusions	12
References	12

Foreword

In 2003 Queen Elizabeth School applied for and was granted a McDowell Foundation grant to further implement its initiative to build moral intelligence (BMI).

In the 2002-2003 school year, the staff and students at Queen Elizabeth School had been using Dr. Michele Borba's book, *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Kids to Do the Right Thing*, to build a caring, respectful learning community in which children make the right choices for the right reasons. Dr. Borba's book presented seven essential virtues for children to learn: empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness. The staff understood the need to teach these values in a meaningful way and was most impressed with the results. We began to see a change in our students, but we also realized that it would take three to five years for second order change to take place in our school.

We knew that we needed to expand our change initiative beyond our school building to our community in order for it to be successful. To help us with this expansion, McDowell Foundation research grants were used to fund BMI activities at our school in 2003-2004 and again in 2004-2005.

Our goals for this research project were to help students:

- Increase on task behavior
- Recognize someone's pain and to stop oneself from acting on cruel intentions
- Control one's impulses and delay gratification
- Listen openly to all sides before judging
- Accept and appreciate differences
- Decipher unethical choices
- Empathize
- Stand up against injustice
- Treat others with compassion

In many ways we have succeeded in our goals but we also recognize that building moral intelligence is an on-going initiative. It will always need to be at the center of what we do. We will take what we have learned through this project and continue making goals for our school based on the information we have gained.

With the funding that this grant has provided, we feel that this initiative has had a major impact in our community.

Jayne Hudson, Principal
For the Staff of Queen Elizabeth School

Building Moral Intelligence One Piece at a Time

As Aristotle taught, people do not naturally become morally excellent or practically wise. They become so, if at all, only as the result of life-long personal and community effort. Jon Moline.

Historical Perspective

1999-2001

In the fall of 1999 Queen Elizabeth School received a grant from the Dr. Stirling McDowell Foundation for Research into Teaching to address issues surrounding the ways students were interacting with each other and the school staff. The school staff worked hard on an action research project to develop, implement, and study an anti-bullying campaign that would create a safe space for all students (Staff of Queen Elizabeth School, Saskatoon, 2002). We felt that the project had a major positive impact; however, the staff also believed that many times students had changed some behaviors without changing their understanding of why they should treat others well. Many students seemed to lack the very moral fiber that is required to make the right choices, especially when no adult was watching.

2002-2003

We realized that what Queen Elizabeth School needed was a program to help them help children be the best they can be. Staff members knew that students who feel safe, have more self-esteem, and have better problem-solving skills are empowered to concentrate on their school work and thus stretch themselves to reach their potential. In looking for resources to help achieve this goal, we became aware of Dr. Michele Borba's book, *Building Moral Intelligence: The Seven Essential Virtues That Teach Children To Do the Right Thing*. Her views were complemented by the vision statement for our school division, which reads in part, "We recognize that every person has personal, physical, emotional, and intellectual needs... In pursuit of our vision, we will be value-driven and people-centered." As a school staff, we understood the need to teach values to students in a meaningful way. In the 2002-2003 school year, the staff and students used Dr. Borba's book to build a caring, respectful learning community in which children make the right choices for the right reasons.

Each staff member read Dr. Borba's book during the summer and, in the fall of 2002, we came together in a retreat at the Brightwater Environmental Center to plan for implementation of Dr. Borba's ideas. She presents seven essential virtues for children to learn: empathy, conscience, self-control, respect, kindness, tolerance, and fairness. Our plan included:

- Sharing the book with the parents at our orientation evening
- Using a virtue a month approach
- Teaching these virtues by integrating them into the curriculum
- Buying books for the library so that parents could borrow the book when needed

- Giving certificates once a month for those students exhibiting the virtues
- Beginning each school newsletter with a discussion about the virtue for that month
- Having two pod meetings, which involve all the staff, to discuss how we were doing, examine evidence of success and discuss our next steps.

When we began using Dr. Borba's book, we were impressed with the results. Staff members began to see a change in their students but we also realized that it takes three to five years for second order change to take place. As well, parental understanding, support, and commitment were essential. There was a need to expand the school's change initiative beyond the school building to the community, if the initiative was to be successful.

2003-2004

We applied for and were awarded a McDowell Foundation grant to help the school expand its BMI initiative to our community the following year. Our expanded initiative included:

- Providing a new text for each staff member to read during the summer
- Holding another fall retreat at Brightwater
- Building a library for parents within the school's Learning Resources Center (LRC)
- Identifying books on each of the virtues in the LRC through the use of coloured stickers
- Placing on the front lawn a new school sign, purchased by the Parent Council, to promote project-related activities
- Having a parenting day to encourage parental support for teaching the seven virtues at home and assist with other parenting issues
- Continuing school assemblies to highlight the virtues
- Continuing the presentation of certificates to students exhibiting virtues
- Holding three pod-meeting days so that we could discuss how we are doing, collect data on student activities, and plan for the future
- Collaborating with other school staffs that were also working on moral education
- Having the students showcase what they had learned through bulletin boards and a display case in the school
- Sending our questionnaires to parents to gather data about the impact of the initiative

We again experienced success. We saw more parental acknowledgment, understanding, and support as well as improved student response to and exhibition of the virtues that had been emphasized. While there were significant changes in student behavior and parent understanding, however, the staff realized that it takes time and follow-through to make lasting changes. Any activity takes twenty-one repetitions to become entrenched as a habit. As stated previously, it takes three to five years to instill a second order change into an institution. As a result of pod meetings, it was decided that if the BMI initiative was to be successful, the scope and emphasis of the project needed to be expanded in a third year of action research. Therefore we again applied for and received a McDowell Foundation grant so that we could continue to explore ways to help the students develop ethical behaviour as a way of life.

The Present

With the McDowell Foundation grant for 2004-2005, we established a BMI committee that oversaw the development of newsletter inserts, made year-long plans, planned monthly assemblies, structured four pod meetings, and invited guest speakers and groups to perform at our school. We also established a Resource Binder Committee that was responsible for expanding teacher knowledge of strategies, compiling strategies, and sharing strategies with other schools. In addition we established a PD/Curriculum Committee that planned PD in-service for staff. As well, one of our staff members became our website master to oversee and update the BMI information on our website. We also provided release time for staff to make presentations about our initiative to other groups.

During our pod meetings we shared successes, investigated our failures, gathered data, and shared information. At these times we decided that we needed to encourage students to provide polite responses automatically in various social situations. We now have set up a bulletin board facing the front door that is used to expand our virtue vocabulary. We also decided to have an assembly a month that emphasizes the virtues. These assemblies consisted of various formats, plays, book readings, etc. We found that favorable comments were coming from students and parents about the certificates that students were receiving, certificates for displaying virtuous behavior. We agreed to use behavior action plans when the students did not use their virtues in order to give the students an opportunity to reflect on their behavior and rectify a problem when needed. We have added a section to our newsletter, "BMI Blossoms." This section was used to highlight all the good things that staff, parents and students see happening in and around our school. In order to celebrate our BMI initiative and our city's centennial year at the end of the year we had each student and staff member make a stepping-stone and set them in concrete outside of our front door.

After the pod meetings in March, 2005, we targeted areas of concern that the staff had identified. As a result, we now have a website with resources and more. A staff member is building a cabinet so that we can display some of the resources available to parents in our front hallway. We also began working on the student behavior issues.

In both 2003-2004 and 2004-2005, the staff looked for evidence of continued change in our students' understanding and exhibition of the seven virtues, greater parental involvement and support, and increased awareness of building moral intelligence in our school division. The parent forum group discussions in the fall of 2004 showed that the parents had a keen understanding of the BMI initiative and they supported it. While the parents supported our school in its fundraising for a school in Ghana, Africa, they indicated in the forum and in the end of the year survey that they would like to see a community service component added to our initiative. The student forum in 2005 indicated many areas of success in instilling the virtues into the everyday lives of the students. It also highlighted some areas that still need to be addressed.

Research Data

SCHOOL STAFF

In order to ascertain the effectiveness of our initiative we gathered data from staff in pod groupings and at staff meetings. These meetings were opportunities to discuss what was working and what was not, how staff members saw their students responding to the strategies being used, and what responses were coming from parents.

Samples of the feedback obtained from pod meetings is provided below:

WHAT HAS WORKED FOR YOU AND YOUR STUDENTS?

From pod meeting in December, 2003:

- *"I" statements – positive thoughts about self and others.*
- *Use of Fairy Tales to identify virtues.*
- *Use of movies.*
- *Assemblies.*
- *Using common language.*
- *Modeling.*
- *Consistent message at home and school.*
- *Fits well with other resources – 7 Habits of Highly Effective Teens.*
- *Relates well to social skills group.*
- *Role plays.*
- *Practice the virtues by identifying them in a statement such as "If I said thank you what would I be showing..."*
- *Put virtues on cards and student chooses one and gives an example.*
- *Spot checks.*
- *Books from the library.*
- *Staff intentionally noticing virtues.*
- *ACT-now showed video at assembly.*
- *Virtue of the month.*
- *Large signs.*
- *Kindness bird – stuffed animal – student holds bird and says something nice about someone.*
- *Creative writing.*
- *Large signs.*
- *Bulletin boards that promote virtues.*
- *Reflective writing.*
- *Use of quizzes from BMI book.*
- *Virtue goal for each morning.*
- *Secret friends.*

From pod meeting in March, 2004:

- *Students are automatically using the BMI language.*
- *Assemblies are good.*
- *We are living BMI.*
- *Certificates.*
- *Sister looks after baby brother, shows caring.*
- *We welcome kids back and give them many chances.*
- *New student hurt hand and another student empathized with her.*
- *Group of girls made sure a new student felt welcomed.*
- *Students will say when a virtue is seen in a book without being asked.*
- *Student saw someone who was sad and responded appropriately.*
- *Tolerance – use the language when dealing with students, respect is emphasized.*
- *Noticed less need for intervention during supervision, asks, "What do you need?" Guide the students to sort out their problems. "Did you get what you needed?"*
- *Learn from doing.*
- *Need to model for emphasis.*
- *Journal writing in the upper years.*
- *Recess time – the students don't talk back and are respectful. We are having less and less disrespect.*
- *We live the virtues.*
- *Students say hello and are friendly.*
- *There is no "class from hell" here.*
- *Pleasure to be around the students.*
- *Newsletter helps the parents know what we are doing.*
- *Assemblies are helpful.*
- *Parents said positives about BMI at interviews.*
- *Assemblies are helpful.*
- *Resources and pod meetings are useful.*
- *Change in language.*
- *Resources, e.g., Chicken Soup Books.*
- *SLC sponsored drama.*
- *Two gr. 8 students helped a gr. 1 student who was very upset.*
- *Not as many problems with S2P.*
- *Not as much tattling and fighting.*
- *We all have the same expectations.*
- *We all ask what did you need/want?*
- *Fewer students sent to the office.*
- *Not as many hat and front door issues.*

From pod meeting in March, 2005:

- *Oh Canada sets the tone for the day.*
- *We connect positively and invitingly with students and staff.*
- *Visitors perceive students as polite and courteous.*
- *Assemblies provide a sense of unity. Etiquette has improved.*
- *Playground behavior has improved.*

- *The action plans work when enforcing virtues.*
- *Accountability is increasing. For example, students are saying sorry without prompting.*
- *BMI Blossoms in the newsletters are interesting. People seem to zero in on them.*
- *Huge cooperation of staff for the benefit of students.*
- *Staff is welcoming. No grudges held as evidenced by the many chances and opportunities we give students to make the necessary changes to be successful and feel good about their accomplishments.*
- *BMI assemblies.*
- *Older students 'buying into' the 2 songs we do (O Siem, and Friends).*
- *Structured Success integration support.*
- *BMI bulletin Board.*
- *Behavior Incident Reports (different versions also a plus).*

WHAT IS NOT WORKING?

From pod meeting in December, 2003:

- *Like to see the virtues in more non structured time.*
- *For kindergarten, order of virtues did not work.*
- *Need to be reminded that the focus is on personal growth and not to point the finger at someone else.*
- *Students need to be reminded to use skills.*
- *Gr. 8 are still aggressive on the playground.*
- *Follow through is different for itinerant staff.*
- *Some students are seeing this as a game.*
- *Not always easy to insert into the curriculum.*
- *Takes 3-7 years.*
- *Parent letting child watch inappropriate TV, movies, etc.*
- *21 rep. to become a habit.*

From pod meeting in March, 2004:

- *Practicality (how can I fit the virtue into the lesson).*
- *Make sure bulletin boards reflect what is being learned.*
- *Need to make sure students are "living" the virtues.*
- *Need to make sure we encourage students to internalize the virtues because they will feel better/become a better person.*
- *Need to do more for the community.*
- *Need to be better citizens.*
- *Sometimes a lesson bombs.*
- *Need to work on certificate presentation – needs to be more special – maybe practice using the microphone.*
- *Get certificates for the right reasons not just because it is their turn.*
- *Need to have more live performances so students know how to perform and how to respond when others perform.*
- *Work on self-esteem.*
- *More connection with the virtues with the community.*

- *How do we fit it into the curriculum?*
- *A curriculum mandate that formalizes BMI would be helpful.*
- *How do you know students are getting it outside of the school environment?*
- *Wondering if the lesson is getting through to students.*
- *Teachers feeling pressured to teach the virtues and the curriculum.*
- *Do students understand the vocabulary?*
- *Attendance is a problem for some – needs students here consistently.*
- *Worry about intrinsic development of virtues.*

From pod meeting in March, 2005:

- *Improved community involvement.*
- *Often activities have a larger teacher leadership component than student leadership. (Kids can develop ideas but are short on follow through without constant reminder.)*
- *Need more celebrating of students to build community and belonging i.e. pep rally, more care partner activities formally organized.*
- *Parent Library needs more use.*
- *Feedback forms need higher percent of returns.*
- *Bullying in the form of intimidation and exclusion. (Grade 8 mentioned but also seen in other classes.)*
- *Student leadership is lacking.*
- *Hallway noise when students in transit (classroom doors needing to be kept closed).*
- *Changes to web site with a list of books available as resources (BMI, Bullying, etc.). Also the use of a display case in addition to the web site additions.*

PARENTS

We noted how often the parents were accessing the materials in the LRC that had been provided for parents to use with their children. We received feedback from parents about the initiative by holding parent focus groups in the fall and providing parent surveys in the spring. The questionnaire for parents consisted of the following questions:

1. Are you aware of our "Building Moral Intelligence" initiative?
2. If yes: What do you like about this initiative?
3. What are your concerns?
4. Has your child benefited from this initiative?
5. How have you learned about this initiative? (School newsletter, classroom newsletter, bulletin boards, talking to your child, talking to friends, etc.)
6. Do you have other comments about the initiative?

All parents who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they would like BMI to continue and felt it had a positive influence on their child. The feedback from the parental surveys contained these positive comments:

- *I'd like to say thank you for all the QE staff for having such a positive and energetic outlook on teaching. It really shines through.*
- *We are very pleased at how our children have adapted and have been accepted into a new school.*
- *I think the BMI can only work successfully when parents reinforce all the morals and values at home.*
- *As a parent, it's great to see the students so proud of their BMI accomplishments. It's a wonderful program.*
- *I see QE as being a great school and we have enjoyed it this year.*
- *It is good for all kids in the school. It teaches them a good thing.*
- *It supports the parents. It is a reference point for teaching children and it helps the adults act in the same way. It takes away the gray areas with behavior. Everyone is on the same page.*
- *I like the specificity of the virtues. They make sense.*

Some concerns were expressed:

- *...I am not sure if I have seen any proof that it is happening at the kindergarten level.*
- *Once concern is the transfer of moral intelligence onto the playground, into field trips and outside of school.*
- *I am concerned about the attitude of some of the students in the older grades.*

STUDENTS

Teacher-led focus groups were held with students in Grades 1 – 8 in the spring. The groups were asked some predetermined questions to gain an understanding of their thoughts regarding the initiative. Students within the groups were chosen at random to answer questions or discuss them. Some questions and a summary of the responses are given below:

Questions	% of Positive Responses
Do you feel safe on the playground at QE?	88%
Are people kind at QE?	100%
Is QE a friendly place to be?	88%
When you have a problem, do you know how to solve it?	88%
Has BMI made you a better person?	75%
Do you feel included in the classroom?	100%
Do you feel included on the playground?	58%
Do you think BMI is making a difference?	50%
Are the rules at QE fair?	100%
Do the rules at QE help you?	91%
Would you tell a new kid on your block to come to QE?	88%

Given below is an example of the comments students made in response to discussion questions:

What do you know about BMI?

- *BMI virtues will make your world a better place.*
- *It helps people in need; people may help you when you are in need.*
- *If you show virtues and are not mean, people will want to play with you.*
- *You can be an example to younger students.*
- *Use BMI at home – if you are nice to your brothers and sisters they will be nice to you.*
- *It's not just for kids; parents need it too.*
- *Most staff usually show virtues.*
- *People are getting kinder at school.*
- *When two kids were playing soccer with their class and one of them slipped, the other kid helped him up.*
- *It means we are caring and we help people with their troubles.*
- *We stand up for people by using kindness and respect and all of the virtues.*
- *Empathy.*
- *Sometimes people forget to use it (i.e. fight; breaking windows).*
- *Has not changed older kids who have been here a long time (i.e. swearing, pushing, bullying).*
- *People who were bullies before BMI are still bullies today.*
- *We stick up for people when someone is being mean to them.*
- *We stand for self control – we use self control when we get angry instead of running away.*
- *We use self-control when people are yelling by telling them 'please stop yelling'.*
- *Q.E. stands for all the virtues.*
- *Is important.*
- *Is helpful to people.*
- *Learn skills to help others.*
- *Helps you care about others.*
- *All of the virtues help you "do good and tell you what not to do".*
- *You know how people are feeling.*
- *Can make you a better person.*
- *Show respect by being nice.*
- *Show all of your virtues by being fair, respectful, kind and helpful.*

Conclusions

All of us are aware of the violence in our society and the need to educate students in a way that will help prepare them to make the right choices so that our society will be safer for all of us. As Dr. Borba states, "Enhancing our children's moral intelligence is our best hope for getting our kids on the right course so that they do act as well as think right."

Our goal for this research project was to help students:

- Increase on task behavior
- Recognize someone's pain and to stop oneself from acting on cruel intentions
- Control one's impulses and delay gratification
- Listen openly to all sides before judging
- Accept and appreciate differences
- Decipher unethical choices
- Empathize
- Stand up against injustice
- Treat others with compassion

In our pod meeting in June, we noted our successes:

- at recess time the students don't talk back and are respectful,
- we are having less and less disrespect,
- we live the virtues,
- students say hello and are friendly,
- there is no extremely difficult class here,
- it is a pleasure to be around the students,
- our newsletters help the parents know what we are doing, and parents said positive things about BMI at interview times.

In many ways we have succeeded in our goals but we also recognize that building moral intelligence is an on-going initiative. It is one that will always need to be at the center of what schools do. We will take what we have learned through this project and continue making goals for our school based on the information we have gained.

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