

(9) Seven Frequently Asked Questions about Values for Life:

An Initiative to Promote Academic, Social, and Emotional Excellence

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Exhibit 1: What are Values for Life?

Value Category	Positive	Negative
<i>Love & Respect</i>	Respects differences; avoids racist, classist, or sexist teasing or joking; displays special regard for those older and carries sense of responsibility for those younger; goes to aid of those in distress; expresses and receives constructive love.	Disrespects others; shows intolerance for differences; ridicules or makes fun of others; initiates racist, classist, or sexist jokes or pranks; low regard for older persons; little sense of responsibility for those younger; ignores those in distress; antisocial.
<i>Interpersonal Skills</i>	Sensitive to feelings of others; accurately reads feelings and moods of others; expresses thoughts and feelings constructively; exercises self-discipline, patience, and control in managing conflict; is capable of leading others constructively; seeks and considers constructive counsel; takes constructive criticism without crumbling or withdrawing.	Insensitivity to feelings of others; misreads feelings and moods of others; unable to express thoughts and feelings constructively; unable to control own behavior in conflict situations; unable to lead others constructively; difficulty asking for help; unable to take constructive criticism; crumbles in face of constructive criticism.
<i>Learning Orientation</i>	Is savvy, creative, inventive; asks questions, wants to know how things work; remembers, identifies, compares, contrasts, generalizes; sees connections between different areas of learning; enjoys helping others learn.	Shows little creativity, bored easily, asks and answers few questions; fails to seek or express relationships between different areas of learning; poor memory for stories or events read or heard; unwilling to help others learn.
<i>Self-Confidence</i>	Explores, probes, investigates; attentive and enthusiastic when new challenges are introduced; eager to explore new places, meet new people, or examine new ideas, daring in constructive ways; excited and upbeat about living.	Is inattentive, withdrawn, apathetic, unenthusiastic, shy, reclusive, doubtful, uninterested, unsure of oneself, unexpressive; unwilling to try things new and different; unmotivated; daring in destructive ways.
<i>Self-Persistence</i>	Sticks with task until it's finished, even when the going is frustrating or rough; maintains focus in face of distractions; patient in figuring things out; seeks out challenging or difficult tasks; overcomes obstacles in solving problems; bounces back from frustrations; has surprisingly long and sustained attention span.	Gives up, easily distracted, avoids challenges, readily frustrated, impatient during problem solving; unwilling to try after frustrated, unable to see alternatives; unable to move forward—gets stuck; refuses to complete project started; moves to another activity when frustrated.
<i>Self-Esteem</i>	Expresses pleasure over own accomplishments; shares accomplishments with others; expresses positive interest in others' accomplishments; maintains cool in face of teasing; feels good about who s/he is; deals with negative as well as positive aspects of self and others.	Apathetic about accomplishments, unwilling to share accomplishments with others; jealous or angry over others' accomplishments; negative attitudes toward self and others; unable to see negative as well as positive aspects of self; loses cool when teased.
<i>Self-Reliance</i>	Able to think and act alone when necessary, resists temptations to mischief, avoids physically and emotionally hazardous situations, thinks before acting, stands up for what's fair, responds appropriately to racist, sexist or classist stereotypes	Follows more than leads, easily tempted to do wrong, gets into dangerous or potentially harmful situations, acts without thought, doesn't speak up for what's right, goes along with others who express racist, classist, or sexist stereotypes.

Values for Life curriculum is designed to (a) move students in the right-hand column to the left-hand column and (b) move students in the left-hand column from lower to higher levels of positive expression of each value.

2. Where do Values for Life come from?

WHEN BLACK AND WHITE PARENTS AND GRANDPARENTS of low and middle income are asked to envision what they want their children or grandchildren to be like as adolescents and young adults, they reliably affirm one or more of seven aspirations we've referred to as Values for Life: *I want my child or grandchild to excel in Love and Respect, Interpersonal Skills, Learning Orientation, Self-Confidence, Self-Persistence, Self-Esteem, and Self-Reliance*. Teachers and clergy also affirm the importance of these values for triumphant living.

3. Are Values for Life another form of character education?

Yes, Values for Life are another form of character education¹. But there are four major distinctives that separate Values for Life from alternative models of character education (Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003; Kouyaté & Taylor, in preparation):

1. *Differences in origin*. Although values undergirding character education initiatives are generally assumed to be correct by virtue of expert opinion or historical analysis, Values for Life issue from the hearts of parents, teachers, and clergy who co-occupy places where our children live and sometimes die. One could make the case that the former might be less intrinsically motivating than the latter. To the extent that mobilization of parent, teacher, and community is critical in closing the racial achievement gap, this difference may be of considerable psychological significance.
2. *Differences in grounding*. Values featured in character education models are typically directed toward creating a civil society, whereas Values for Life are directed first and foremost directed toward promoting spiritually² and culturally³ integrative ways of being—a liberating sense of hope, a viable sense of connection to community past and present, the audacity to think oneself capable of change against the odds (our spirituality standard), and a view of oneself as fully human—possessed by noble vision and corresponding purpose (our cultural standard). We believe that *only* when these integrations are embraced by character education reforms will the most mature expression of civil society emerge—a relentless questing for truth and justice with love and peace.
3. *Differences in theory*. The social theory underlying character education is fragmentary at best, whereas values for life are based on an elaboration of the theory of reasoned action (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975; Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), one of our most successful theories for understanding and predicting social behaviors of a wide range (Evans & Taylor, 1995).
4. *Differences in measurement*. Currently, there are few reliable and valid measures of values underlying character education initiatives, whereas there are reliable and valid measures of Values for Life for preschoolers, elementary school students, and adolescents and adults.

¹ Two-thirds of the nation's schools are now required to implement character education programs.

² We do *not* mean by 'spirituality' an endorsement of any particular articles of faith or religious affiliation. Rather, we mean by 'spirituality' the capacity to hope, a vital and energizing sense of connection to one's local, extended, and historical communities, and a belief in one's capacity to change things—one's self, one's community, one's environment. Academic engagement and achievement flourish when one's spirituality attains this manner of integration.

³ Cultural integration refers to one's capacity to overcome and supplant racist stereotypes of blacks as mentally defective and physically gifted with a nobler vision of oneself, one's people, one's nation and even the world. This nobler vision nurtures academic engagement and achievement.

4. Are Values for Life associated with academic, social, and emotional success?

1. We have found in preschool settings that Values for Life programs accelerated the rate of cognitive, emotional, and social development of children (Taylor, Turner, Underwood, Franklin, Jackson, & Stagg, 1994; Taylor, 2004b). Indeed, initially evidence of underperformance on five subscales on a standardized development test was eliminated on 4 of 5 scales within 7.5 months of intervention and nearly eliminated on the fifth scale.
2. We found that teacher ratings of the behavioral expression of Values for Life are associated with performance on standardized measures of reading and math achievement. On the math section of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, we found that 2nd and 3rd grade students rated at or above the median on self-persistence, self-esteem, *or* self-reliance were 5 to 8 times more likely to score at or above the 50th percentile relative to students rated below the median on the behavioral expression of these values. On the reading component of the Stanford Achievement Test 9, students rated at or above the median on love and respect, interpersonal skills, learning orientation, *or* self-confidence were a minimum of 6 times more likely to score at or above the 50th percentile (Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003).
3. Following one year's application of Values for Life in an all-Black public elementary school, we found (Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003):
 - Improvement in Academic Achievement.* Modest to appreciable increases on most standardized measures of reading and math achievement through 4th grade (see answer to question 6 for detailed summary).
 - Improvement in Academic Engagement.* Relative to the two preceding years our intervention, we found that attendance went up, tardiness went down, and in-school suspensions were lower. An anthropologist conducted qualitative interviews on a random sample of students. In general she found that although students felt their neighborhoods were unsafe, they perceived their school as safe and their principal and teachers as caring.
4. Results of research conducted by majors in Africana Studies at the University of Pittsburgh suggest that among college students Values for Life are associated with enhanced:
 - Cognitive Skills.* African American undergraduates high in Self-Persistence reported an overall grade average of +.3 points above average, those low in Self-Persistence -.9 points below average (Williams, 1999). Students high in Self-Esteem reported an overall grade average of +.2 points above average, those low in Self-Esteem a -.8 points below average (Baxter, 1999). In these studies, approximately one full grade-point average separated students high and low in Self-Persistence or Self-Esteem.
 - Basic Motivation.* We found that students high in Self Confidence reported significantly better study skills; higher occupational and economic aspirations, greater utilization of academic resources, and superior achievement motivation

(Johnson, 1999). Students high in Self Persistence reported significantly better study skills and superior achievement motivation (Williams, 1999). African American students high in Learning Orientation reported more favorable attitudes toward taking technically demanding courses—calculus, chemistry, and biology (Strothers, Joell, & Day, 1997).

Socioemotional Skills. African American students high in Self-Esteem reported significantly better study skills and higher utilization of academic resources (Baxter, 1999). On this sample we also found that students high in Self Reliance reported significantly better study skills and superior achievement motivation than students low in Self-Reliance (Lawrence, 1999).

5. Values for Life carry implications for civic excellence. Pitt students along with their professor in Africana Studies (Taylor & students, 2000) analyzed biographies and autobiographies of a large number of great African American leaders over the last 150 years. These male and female movers and shakers typically possessed one or more of six attributes that intersect with Values-for-Life categories in the following way:

Persuasive. Capable of influencing others (Interpersonal Skills);

Organizer. Capable of pulling people together for collective action (Interpersonal Skills, Love & Respect);

Activist. Capable of taking and maintaining unpopular positions (Self-Reliance; Self-Persistence);

Learner. Well read and informed and concerned equally with informing and instructing others (Learning Orientation; Self-Confidence);

Spiritual. Anchored by scriptural text, meditative life, a sense of the sacred and holy (all value categories are normalized to promote a spiritually integrated way of being (see left column of Exhibit 1); and

Inclusive. A vital sense of connection to community, one's own and that of others (Love and Respect).

While these attributes were abstracted from a study of exemplary African American leaders, we believe the case can be made that their expression through Values for Life have positive implications for the well-being of black *and* white children and youth as well as the nation as a whole. Presently, Values for Life curriculum is now available for grades pre-K to 12.

5. What methods are used to promote Values for Life?

In instructional settings within and outside school, four interlocking strategies are used to promote the medial and behavioral expression of each of the seven Values for Life. We refer to these strategies by the acronym **VERN**:

1. *Valuation*. We use a combination of cultural proverbs, biographies, stories, and icons that are processed in a manner to deepen students' understanding and commitment to each value.
2. *Exemplification*. We use cultural proverbs, biographies, stories, and icons to recognize and reward student behaviors which conform to each value and to correct student behaviors which are value incongruent.

3. *Routines*. We use 11 instructional and complementary behaviors that in various combinations maximize the medial and behavioral expression of each of the seven Values for Life.
4. *Networking*. We provide structured feedback to instructors on how their implementation of Valuation, Exemplification, and Routines promote the achievement of each of the seven Values for Life.

6. Do these methods actually increase the behavioral expression of Values for Life and improve achievement scores?

In classrooms randomly assigned to Regular Head Start and Values for Life Head Start in Greene and Washington Counties of Pennsylvania, we found at year's end that Values for Life Head Start significantly outperformed Regular Head Start on practically all Values for Life assessments (Taylor, Turner, Underwood, Franklin, Jackson, & Stagg, 1994). Likewise, these methods have increased the behavioral and medial expression of Values for Life in preschool programs and a child care drop-in center serving children of parents recovering from opiate addiction (Taylor, *et al.*, 1994).

Here we provide a detailed summary of results of changes on standardized measures of reading and math following one year's implementation of Values for Life in an all-black public elementary school. Most of its students lived in a high-poverty public housing community. We report changes in Year 1 to Year 2 achievement pattern for those grades where achievement data were available (Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003):

- 2nd Graders*. Percent scoring at or above the national norm in math increased from 25% to 62% (Iowa Test of Basic Skills); percent scoring at or above the national norm in reading increased from 21% to 29% (Stanford Achievement Test 9);
- 3rd Graders*. Percent scoring at or above the national norm in math increased from 45% to 59% (Iowa Test of Basic Skills); percent scoring at or above the national norm in reading increased from 21% to 50% (Stanford Achievement Test 9);
- 4th Graders*. Percent of students achieving standard in math skills increased from 24% to 27%, percent achieving standard in math concepts increased from 0% to 44%, percent achieving standard in math problem remained the same 0% to 0% (New Standards); percent of students achieving standard in basic reading increased from 35% to 45%, percent of students achieving standard in reading understanding and analysis remained the same 17% and 17% (New Standards); and
- 5th Graders*. Percent scoring at or above state norm in math increased from 4% to 16% (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment); percent scoring at or above state norm in reading decreased from 12% to 9%. *It is important to note in relation to these disappointing patterns of achievement that only 5th grade teachers showed significant decreases in implementing our model from pre-to-post on select values (e.g., Self-Persistence)*. Indeed, the level of implementation by 5th grade teachers was no more than half the level of implementation by 4th grade teachers (Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003). Quality of implementation, then, may make a difference in quality of achievement outcomes.

Our preliminary finding suggest that our model promotes the medial and behavioral expression of Values for Life (Taylor *et al.*, 1994) and modest to appreciable changes on standardized measures of reading and math achievement (Taylor & Kouyaté, 2003).

7. What does a lesson module and schedule look like?

Objective: Illustrated for the Value Self-Reliance

Our objective here is to increase students' level of Self-Reliance, i.e., to help them think and act alone when necessary, resist temptations to mischief, avoid physically and emotionally hazardous situations, think before acting, stand up for what's fair, respond appropriately to racist, sexist or classist stereotypes.

If efforts are successful in creating a classroom climate supportive of students' Self-Reliance, what implications might this have for teacher and principal (a) perceptions of themselves, (b) sense of effectiveness, and (c) experience of professional satisfaction?

Rationale

In a study of 2nd and 3rd grade students, we found that students rated as average or above on self-reliance were 8 times more likely to score at or above the 50th percentile on the math component of the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and 2.5 times more likely to score at or above the 50th percentile on the reading component of the Stanford Achievement Test.

If able to boost Self-Reliance in your [elementary, middle, high school], what might the implications be for students' (a) academic engagement and achievement? (b) social maturity, and (c) emotional adjustment?

Methods (VERN)

Valuation: Here we describe how to process the following proverb to increase students' interest in self-reliance (taken from *Valuation Curriculum for High School Students*, 2005):

1. **Introduce the Proverb:** *Right is right if nobody's doing it and wrong is wrong if everybody's doing it* (African American proverb). This proverb is introduced and discussed in terms of its intended meaning and implications for individuals and community. Discuss the main b implication of this proverb: *Do the right thing no matter what others say!* Why would African American ancestors say such a thing?
2. **Lead Discussion on Personal Implications:** Do you think living this proverb might prove helpful in encouraging you to...
 - a. listen carefully to teacher instruction? Why?
 - b. complete your seatwork? Why?
 - c. complete your homework? Why?
 - d. visit the library of a regular basis? Why?

- e. read at least 25 books from the library each year? Why?
 - f. help other students with their homework? Why?
3. Lead Discussion on Social Implications: Do you know people who live this proverb? What are they like? Do you people whose lives don't live this proverb? What are they like? How would you describe the difference between those who live this proverb and those who do not? In what ways might living this proverb improve your neighborhood or community?
 4. Lead Discussion on Educational Implications: If students in your school believed this proverb, what would your school be like? If you yourself lived this proverb, what would your future be like?
 5. Strengthen Normative Support: Who agrees with Robbie's answer? Why? Is there a friend or someone in your family you'd like to share *and* discuss this proverb with? Will you promise to do it this week? Will you share *and* discuss it with this person this week? Will you promise to share with the group how this discussion went?

Exemplification: Here we illustrate how prior exposure to this proverb and a complementary biography on Frederick Douglass can be used to support or correct student behaviors (taken from *Exemplification Curriculum for High School Students*, 2005):

- Support: *Gwen, I saw you stand up for Aisha. I heard Rhonda and Kayla trying to slam her, but you came to her defence. You showed real Self-Reliance. Remember our discussion of the proverb 'Right is right if nobody's doing it and wrong is wrong if everybody's doing it? You lived that proverb today. Your ancestors would be proud!*
- Correct: *You let your friends talk you into not completing your homework? Do you remember our discussion about Frederick Douglass who went looking for pages of books to read from storm drains? Who fought against popular opinions that blacks shouldn't and couldn't read? Frederick Douglass is a study in Self-Reliance. I know how much your friends mean to you, but being Self-Reliant could mean a lot to your future 10 years from now. You've got a decent future ahead of you. Bring in your completed homework tomorrow. When homework is completed, recognize the effort: *That's it! I'm sure Frederick Douglass would be proud!**

Routines: From developmental research and classroom applications, we have identified core and complementary pedagogical strategies that accelerate the rate of academic achievement and level of social and emotional maturity.

- Core Strategies: The planful use of objective, active, meaningful, and mindful learning paradigms. The goal in every instructional area is to move students from objective toward mindful learning experiences where accelerative effects are most likely to occur.
- Complementary Strategies: The planful use of four strategies that in combination with core strategies accelerate the behavioral and medial expression of Self-Reliance in students: *Stimulates On-Task Behavior* (anticipating trouble spots, providing instruction on how to get through trouble spots, using nonverbal head nod or smile or touch on back of hand to reinforce students' task engagement); *Reverses Off-Task Behavior* (using a calm approach, diagnosing the problem, explaining the problem to student, providing hint on problem solution, and offering opportunity for student to implement and rehearse solution, and then explain the solution to you); *Stimulates Autonomy* (encouraging use of internal and external resources in carrying out individual and group projects); and *Stimulates Role Play* (using skits, bees, and role or game simulations to instruct in math, reading, science, social studies, *etc.*).

Networking (Within 4 Weeks Following Intervention)

Teachers and principal review (a) the direction of change in Self-Reliance from pre to post; (b) the frequency with which instructional strategies identified for valuation, exemplification, and routines have been implemented; and (c) examine the relationship between (b) and (a).

Scheduling

We examine how our Values for Life model operates from ground level. Each year a calendar is published which identifies when each value will be targeted for intervention during the school year. Typically each value is featured for a period of 4-6 weeks. Let us say that the value Self-Reliance has been selected for a six-week period of implementation:

Before (1 Week Prior to Intervention)

1. Principal in consultation with teachers post displays: posters and banners that signal start of the 6 week period of intervention featuring Self-Reliance.
2. Teachers in consultation with principal complete a 12-item inventory on participating students' Self-Reliance.

During (Weeks 1-6 of Intervention)

1. Week 1: Teachers complete pre-intervention assessments and introduce valuation and display materials identified for Self-Reliance.
2. Weeks 2-6: Teachers daily utilize exemplification materials identified for Self-Reliance.
3. Weeks 1-6: Teachers daily implement core behaviors common to all values—see section on Routines)
4. Weeks 1-6: Teachers daily implement complementary behaviors specific to Self-Reliance—see section on Rotines.
5. Weeks 1-6: Teachers daily complete monitoring forms which identify the frequency and completeness with which items 1-4 have been implemented.
6. Week 6: Teachers complete post-intervention assessments.

Analogous procedures and scheduling would follow for each of the remaining values.

Our experience is that teachers can be taught how to become intentional in using core behaviors that promote basic and analytical thinking—critical skills we believe for accelerating achievement in math and reading as well as civics, history, science, and other disciplines. Likewise, we believe mentors and tutors can be introduced to these methods that we expect will contribute to the *acceleration* of achievement gains on standardized tests of reading, math, and science.

Moreover, teachers, mentors, and tutors can be taught how to become intentional in blending core *and* complementary behaviors that enhance noncognitive skills that enhance academic engagement and achievement.

Are there supplementary programs that enhance Values for Life in schools?

(a) Introduction to Values for Life in the language, visual, and performing arts

For classes or activities in areas of the language, visual, and performing arts, we are close to completing curriculum products and corresponding pedagogy that together we expect will promote the medial and behavioral expression of Values for Life in students exposed to this model (Taylor & Kouyaté, in preparation: *Values for Life in the Arts; Cultural Project: Promoting Axiological and Spiritual Integrations to Promote Values for Life*).

(b) Introduction to Values for Life peer support groups

Under consideration are two complementary initiatives directed toward a singular goal—to create a school-wide peer culture supportive of Values for Life:

- **The Griot Academy**, funded by the Pittsburgh School District, is being developed by Dr. Malik Kouyaté whose family forbearers have served as distinguished and celebrated griots in the West African country of Guinea. This initiative will focus on teacher and student nominated school leaders who will be instructed in how to broadly encourage the medial and behavioral expression of Values for Life among their peers. This, then, is a *leader-to-peer initiative* that we expect will have general implications for leadership development within and beyond the Academy.
- **Our Peer Support Initiative**, funded by Buhl Foundation, was developed by Dr. Sekai Turner and a team of graduate students (Turner, Lyons, Smith, & Collins: *Values for Life Peer Support Manual*). The purpose of this initiative is to shape *peer-to-peer* relationships in ways that broadly encourage the medial and behavioral expression of Values for Life. This program was recognized by former Governor Tom Ridge as one of the three top models of violence prevention in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

(c) Introduction to Values for Life Parenting groups

For years we have been successful in conducting instructional groups which equip parents with knowledge and motivate them to use this knowledge to promote Values for Life in the home (Taylor, Franklin, & Taylor: *Values for Life Parenting Group Manual*).

(d) Introduction to Values for Life initiatives for churches and organizations

We have developed, with funding from the PACE Foundation, a manual that can be used to help church schools, youth activity leaders, and community organization staff promote Values for Life within and beyond these settings.

(e) Introduction to Virtues for Life initiative for churches

We expect that the inculcation of key virtues will have salutary effects on the academic, social, and emotional development of students. The following four virtues, which will be introduced by our church partners with prior approval by parents, have been described as critical in undergirding the spiritual and cultural journey of Africans Americans past and present (Samuel K. Roberts, 1999). We shall refer to these as Virtues for Life:

1. **Prudence:** Cultivating and championing the discipline of mind that challenges and overturns racist conceptions about blacks.
2. **Justice:** Questing for a society where *the rights, duties, and protection of every citizen* [are] *guaranteed*.
3. **Fortitude:** Believing that an *enlightened and cultivated mind* [can] *alter circumstances and the realities around them*.
4. **Temperance:** A disciplined process of deliberation that includes ordering options and choosing rightly and wisely.

In Exhibit 2, we provide an example which is equally applicable to minority and poor students and would prove instructive for non-minority and non-poor students as well.

Exhibit 2: Spiritual Virtue of Fortitude

From *Spiritual Rites of Passage Workbook* Overcoming Family Hardships

Jesus was born poor (2 Cor 8:9). At birth he was laid in a feeding trough for animals (Lk 2:7). He came from a large family that included at least seven children (Matt 13:55-56). Jesus' family moved at least four times within a period of two years during his early years (Matt 2:11, 16, 23). It is likely that Jesus' father died sometime after he was 12 years of age (have you noticed there is no mention of Jesus' father after that age?). He was raised in a city with a bad reputation—*Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?* (John 1:46). Some of his ancestors had been involved in murder, adultery, prostitution, and incest (Matt 1:1-17).

As we shall see, Jesus overcame family hardships:

- Poverty didn't stop him
 - Possibly being raised part of his life in a single-parent home didn't stop him.
 - Frequent moves of his family during his early years didn't later stop him.
 - Being raised in a city with a bad reputation didn't stop him.
 - Having family members who'd committed criminal acts didn't stop him.
1. Do you have friends whose families are like those of Jesus' family?
 2. Are there any similarities between your family and Jesus' family?
 3. Your hardships may be unlike those described for Jesus' family.
 4. What are some of the family hardships you face?

Group Prayer:

We thank God for sending Jesus as an example of how family adversities can be overcome. We pray for hope and confidence to overcome family adversities in our lives, whatever they may be. Help us also to share your hope with others who don't know you, so that they too can live confident lives in the face of family adversities.

