

Teacher: Students Crave Ethics Instruction

High school English teacher Paul Barnwell made two interesting observations yesterday in [The Atlantic](#).

The first was that his students have no moral compass. Barnwell discovered this when discussing various ethical issues with his class. His students were, he found, quite oblivious to internationally and historically accepted values of moral living.

But perhaps such a finding should not be surprising, given that schools are increasingly plagued by disrespectful and less-than-virtuous [student](#) – [and teacher](#) – behavior.

The second observation was slightly more surprising, however. According to Barnwell, his students did not find discussions about ethics, morality, virtue, and character dull and boring. Instead, they were hungry for more:

“‘Do you think you should discuss morality and ethics more often in school?’ I asked the class. The vast majority of heads nodded in agreement. Engaging in this type of discourse, it seemed, was a mostly foreign concept for the kids.

...

As my students seemed to crave more meaningful discussions and instruction relating to character, morality, and ethics, it struck me how invisible these issues have become in many schools. By omission, are U.S. schools teaching their students that character, morality, and ethics aren't important in becoming productive, successful citizens?”

As Barnwell goes on to briefly note, straying away from

teaching character and morality in our nation's schools is contrary to the vision which the American Founders had for education.

Ben Franklin is a prime example of this. In 1749, he [encouraged](#) Pennsylvania's early schools to continually discuss advantages and disadvantages of such character qualities as "Temperance, Order, Frugality, Industry, Perseverance" and so on.

Likewise, [George Washington maintained](#) that a good academic education alone could not enable "national morality" to continue.

Furthermore, [Thomas Jefferson noted](#) that virtue "is the true scope of all academical emulation."

As early as 1944, [C.S. Lewis referenced](#) this drift away from teaching students the objective truths of ethical morality in school. Such a trend, Lewis wrote, would eventually cause "the destruction of the society which accepts it."

Do you think Lewis was right in his assessment? And if so, are students like those Barnwell describes demonstrating that our society is closer to destruction than we realize?