



Epic Ethics for Peaceful Schools

History: Program to Curriculum

Epic Ethics for Peaceful Schools began as the **Peaceful Schools Program**, a Rotary project to promote safe, respectful and compassionate school climates for children and youth. The program was developed by Colorado Rotary Clubs in partnership with the Conflict Center and Operation Respect. The program is based on Rotary's guiding principles, together called the 4-way-test, to enhance character development and community through a series of literacy-based classroom lessons combining stories and activities with interactive student discussion. High school students can be engaged and trained to conduct these classroom-based lessons, supplementing the classroom teacher and fostering cross-generational and high-impact learning.

The program has proven to be a powerful, proactive, and results-oriented curriculum for developing both ethical character and social-emotional learning in children and youth. Since 2015, this program has been implemented in dozens of schools in Colorado, positively impacting thousands of elementary school children and hundreds of high school students.

Initially sponsored by Rotary, the program subsequently formed a separate nonprofit organization called **Unite for Common Good (UCG)**. In 2019 the program was renamed **Epic Ethics for Peaceful Schools** and **UCG** partnered with the **Daniels Fund**, a Denver CO based foundation, to offer the program as the **Daniels Fund Ethics Initiative Elementary School Program**.

Components

The **Epic Ethics for Peaceful Schools** curriculum includes five Social, Emotional, and Cultural Learning themed instructional designs for each grade, Kindergarten through sixth. The themes include: Building Community, Resolving Conflicts Creatively, Celebrating Diversity, Strength Through Peace, and Expressing Feelings. Each instructional design is a menu with which to build several (~10) different lessons around literacy prompts and accompanying activities that focus on variable Social Emotional Learning Objectives using the Ethical Lens of the Four Awesome Questions. Learning moves through a cycle of engagement from **Intrapersonal** to **Interpersonal** to **Community** and **Global Action**. Critical thinking is fostered through the use of open-ended questions that encourage differentiated and authentic participation.



Research

Relevant by Research

Epic Ethics is built and informed by comprehensive research that spans decades of demonstrable outcomes. We are committed to continuously complimenting and refining approaches and materials to include current best practices in Ethical Processing, Social Emotional Learning, Peace Building and Community Engagement. Efficacy of Epic Ethics is confirmed through the use of qualitative (authentic feedback and demonstration) and quantitative measures (randomized control trials, quasi-experimental and correlative models) to track development and success. Part of the strength of the Epic Ethics Curriculum stems from its inclusion of the whole community. Students, instructors, mentors etc are all involved in the assessment process in order to gain a more accurate picture of growth and impact.

Results

Improved Ethical Reasoning

Impulsivity as a human behavior describes the inclination toward “rapid, unplanned reactions to internal or external stimuli without regard to the negative consequences of those reactions” (Moeller, Barratt, Dougherty, Schmitz, & Swann, 2001). Ethical reasoning aids in avoiding impulsive decision making that can lead to detrimental consequences for an individual and their community. The Ethical Framework of the Four Awesome Questions provides a tested and proven tool for autonomous decision-making that contributes to pro-social outcomes. Epic Ethics provides differentiated catalysts for practicing Ethical Reasoning improving critical thinking, demonstration of empathy and reduction of impulsivity in students and community members. Instructors of students that received Epic Ethics routinely report an increase of restraint in student reactions parallel with use of the Four Awesome Questions.

Lades, Leonhard K. (2012) : Impulsive consumption and reflexive thought: Nudging ethical consumer behavior, Papers on Economics and Evolution, No. 1203, Max Planck Institute of Economics, Jena <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/57569/1/687963532.pdf>

Carver, C. S., & Johnson, S. L. (2018). Impulsive reactivity to emotion and vulnerability to psychopathology. *American Psychologist*, 73(9), 1067–1078. <https://doi.org/10.1037/amp0000387>

Growth in Critical Thinking

The use of well-crafted questions in education leads to new insights, generates discussion, and promotes the comprehensive exploration of subject matter (Tofade, 2013). Critical thinking involves practicing a variety of cognitive strategies to arrive at a conclusion, decision or action. Open-ended questions allow for a spectrum of creative analytics and thinking skills to aid in the participation and process of analytics and decision making. Epic Ethics instructors provide regular documentation on the success that the Epic Ethics Curriculum has on improving student ability to contribute relevant ideas and consider novel approaches to problems within a safe, inclusive conversational environment.

Toyin, Tofade, Elsner, Jamie, and Haines, Stuart T. (2013) : Best Practice Strategies for Effective Use of Questions as a Teaching Tool, *American Journal of Pharmaceutical Education*. 77(7): 155. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3776909/>

Social Emotional Development



Epic Ethics curriculum is used as a stand-alone or compliment social-emotional learning program integrating Ethics. For half a century now, research on the need and benefits of targeted social emotional development has pressed for a greater stake in education, community organizations and corporate cultures. While many states have adopted policies to establish a foundation for including SEL in schools authorities must also consider initiatives that move toward a holistic integration of SEL that creates healthy learning environments inclusive of social and extra-social/ ecological systems (Gabriel, 2019). Epic Ethics has deployed targeted assessments to align with the Council for Academic and Social Emotional Learning (CASEL) in order to sequester data directly relevant to articulating social and emotional growth. Current data demonstrates the most deficient areas as self management, trust and vulnerability. Subsequent post-assessment data shows a minimum of 25% improvement in these skill sets after only one trimester of delivery.

As the field of Social Emotional Learning becomes more defined, a more holistic understanding of the needs and interrelationships is rendering. The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) is a model for “unified collaborative approach to learning and health”, published by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The model combines “educational attainment and health”.

Epic Ethics straddles these and more public efforts to address the critical need for Social Emotional Development. We have integrated such policies into a holistically minded curriculum that moves us to consider ethical behavior from inside our person to our families and outside community and world.

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>