

THE NEED FOR CHARACTER EDUCATION

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*“Great learning and superior abilities will be
of little value...unless virtue, truth and
integrity are added to them.”
—Abigail Adams*

—Abstract —

Character education is a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible and caring young people by modelling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share. It is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts and states to instil in their students important core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others.

Good character is not formed automatically; it is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning and practice. It is developed through character education. The intentional teaching of good character is particularly important in today's society since our youth face many opportunities and dangers unknown to earlier generations. They are bombarded with many more negative influences through the media and other external sources prevalent in today's culture. Since children spend about 900 hours a year in school, it is essential that schools resume a proactive role in assisting families and communities by developing caring, respectful environments where students learn core, ethical values. When a comprehensive approach to character education is used, a positive moral culture is created in the school—a total school environment that supports the values taught in the classroom (Character Education Partnership, 2010).

The aim of this study is to provide guidelines for the elements need for effective and comprehensive character education. And to emphasize the need of character education to help students develop good character, which includes knowing, caring about and acting upon core ethical values such as respect, responsibility, honesty, fairness and compassion.

Key words: *Character education, good character, ethical values.*

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1. INTRODUCTION

The English word ‘character’ is derived from the Greek *charaktêr*, which originally referred to a mark impressed upon a coin. Later and more generally, ‘character’ came to mean a distinctive mark by which one thing was distinguished from others, and then primarily to mean the assemblage of qualities that distinguish one individual from another (Homiak, 2007). In other words, our character is our distinctive mark that differentiates ourselves from others. Kevin Ryan and Karen Bohlin (1999) have defined people of good character as individuals who know the good, love the good, and do the good.

Knowing the good includes coming to understand good and evil. It means developing the ability to sum up a situation, deliberate, choose the right thing to do and then do it... Loving the good means developing a full range of moral feelings and emotions, including a love for the good and a contempt for evil, as well as a capacity to empathize with others... Doing the good means that after thoughtful consideration of all the circumstances and relevant facts, we have the will to act. (p. 6)

Everyone wants a child, neighbour, friend or a complete stranger to possess the above characteristics. Yet we know this is not easy to obtain, and once it is obtained, we must acknowledge that the development of children who will possess and act upon ethical sensibilities must begin when they are very young. We want our children to be honest. We want them to respect those different from themselves. We want them to make responsible decisions in their lives. We want them to care about their families, communities and themselves. These things do not happen on their own. It takes all of us, with the support of our schools, to get us there.

1.1. Definitions of Character Education

The character traits should include, but are not limited to, courage, good judgment, integrity, civility, kindness, perseverance, responsibility, tolerance, self-discipline, respect for school personnel, responsibility for school safety, service to others and good citizenship. A person’s “character” refers to the disposition and habits that determine the way that a person normally responds to desires, fears, challenges, opportunities, failures and successes. We describe the character of a person in reference to moral judgments about the worthiness of a

person. Thus, to have a strong, great, or honourable character is to be a person of merit, worthy of admiration and honour. Your character is the sum of all the qualities that make you who you are. It's your values, your thoughts, your words, your actions...in other words, it's YOU. Like it or not, you will often be judged by your character (Singla, 2009).

Character education is a national movement creating schools that foster ethical, responsible and caring young people by modelling and teaching good character through emphasis on universal values that we all share. It is the intentional, proactive effort by schools, districts and states to instill in their students important core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others. Character education is not a "quick fix." It provides long-term solutions that address moral, ethical and academic issues of growing concern to our society and key to the safety of our schools (Character Education Partnership, 2010).

Thomas Lickona describes character education as "the deliberate effort to cultivate virtue." The key word is deliberate. We should not assume that children, left to their own accords, will grow and become young adults of good character. Clearly, children need adults to teach them through example and exhortation.

1.2. The Need for Character Education

The intentional teaching of good character is particularly important in today's society since our youth face many opportunities and dangers unknown to earlier generations. They are bombarded with many more negative influences through the media and other external sources prevalent in today's culture. Therefore, it is critical to create schools that simultaneously foster character development and promote learning. Character Education Informational Handbook & Guide II (2001).

An increasing proportion of young people are growing up without a firm understanding or commitment to the core ethical values needed to inform and energize the conscience. As a result, they lack internal mechanisms to help them know right from wrong and to generate the will power to exercise self-control and consistently do what is right (Josephson, 2002).

1.3. Benefits of Character Education

Character education includes a broad range of concepts such as positive school culture, moral education, just communities, caring school communities, social-emotional learning, positive youth development, civic education, and service

learning. All of these approaches promote the intellectual, social, emotional, and ethical development of young people and share a commitment to help young people become responsible, caring, and contributing citizens. Educating the mind and promoting ethical values that lead to success both for individuals and society. (11 Principles of Effective Character Education, 2010). Below there is a list of benefits of quality character education:

Character education:

- helps students to develop important human qualities such as justice, diligence, compassion, respect, and courage, and to understand why it is important to live by them.
- It promotes character development through the exploration of ethical issues across the curriculum.
- It develops a positive and moral climate by engaging the participation of students, teachers and staff, parents, and communities.
- It teaches how to solve conflicts fairly, creating safer schools that are freer of intimidation, fear, and violence, and are more conducive to learning.
- It not only cultivates minds, it nurtures hearts.
- It is critical for successful schools. It helps children understand the importance of virtues that create a caring and safe school environment.
- It also teaches children the principles of how they can become successful and productive citizens. Without proper values of a caring citizenry, society would crumble. It is imperative for the well-being of our society, that children be taught universal values (Character Education Questions) www.AdvancePublishing.com
- It creates an integrated culture of character that supports and challenges students and adults to strive for excellence.
- It creates schools where children feel safe because they are in an atmosphere that values respect, responsibility and compassion—not because a guard or metal detector is posted at the door.
- It teaches adults and students to understand, engage in, care about, and act on core ethical values such as respect, justice, citizenship, fairness, and responsibility for self and others in school and as part of a larger community.

1.4. Implementation of Character Education

Character education can be initiated at any grade level. It is important to set a strong foundation during the earlier grades and to reinforce and build upon that foundation during the later grades. To be effective, character education must include the entire school community and must be infused throughout the entire school curriculum and culture. Education

The program must stress the qualities of patriotism, responsibility, citizenship, and kindness; respect for authority, life, liberty, and personal property; honesty; charity; self-control; racial, ethnic, and religious tolerance; and cooperation.

Five Keys To Success of Character Education are:

. Instruction Must be Planned

Character education will not just happen. Direct instruction must be planned in advance. Once organized, this will serve as a springboard to other ideas and school-wide activities.

. Application

Students must be able to apply what they have learned. Learning the definition of diligence does a child little good if he seldom sees it in action.

. Teacher Friendly

All instructional and school-wide components of the program must be as teacher friendly as possible. This increases the likelihood of the program being accepted by the teachers and taught effectively.

. Supported By All

To reach its fullest potential, the program should be supported by everyone in the school. School leaders can make it important by providing the necessary materials, scheduling time for the program and assemblies, and talking about it frequently.

. Prepare the Students

Middle school and high school students often approach the notion of character

education with scepticism. Substantial, well planned efforts must be made to create a

school climate conducive to maximum buy-in by students (Character Education Informational Handbook & Guide II (2001).

2. PARTICIPATION IN CHARACTER EDUCATION

Character education must involve the whole community, and every school is a vital link that effort.

2.1. Parent

Parent are the primary and most important moral educators of their children, but the school has a role to play, working with parents in this effort. Public schools should develop character education programs in close partnership with parents and community.

2.2. Schools

To be effective, school-based character education programs need broad support from all stakeholders in the community—educators, parents, community leaders, youth service groups, businesses and faith and charitable groups.

According to Lickona, when a comprehensive approach to character education is used, a positive moral culture is created in the school—a total school environment that supports the values taught in the classroom. This is accomplished through the leadership of the principal, school-wide discipline, a sense of community, democratic student government, a moral community among adults and opportunities to address moral concerns. Schools recruit parents and the community as partners and foster caring beyond the classroom by using inspiring role models and opportunities for community service to help students learn to care by giving care.

2.3. Teachers

Teachers act as caregivers, models and mentors, treating students with love and respect, setting a good example, supporting pro-social behaviour and correcting hurtful actions. The teacher creates a moral community, helping students respect and care about each other and feel valued within the group, and a democratic classroom environment, where students are involved in decision-making. Teachers practice moral discipline, using the creation and application of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, self-control and a respect for others, and teaching values through the curriculum by using academic subjects as vehicles for

examining ethical values. They use cooperative learning to teach children to work together, and they help develop their students' academic responsibility and regard for the value of learning and work. They encourage moral reflection through reading, writing, discussion, decision-making exercises and debate, and they teach conflict resolution to help students learn to resolve conflicts in fair, non-violent ways.

3. IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

3.1. Some Activities to Develop Character

Activity 1:

- Who is the person in your life that you feel has “great character?”
- What are the characteristics, traits, or virtues this person has that make you feel that way?
- How has this person influenced your life?

In an email to all class peers and instructor, answer the above questions. Then students discuss the answers in the classroom.

Activity 2.

- Searching for pictures on the Internet find at least one picture that depicts one of these six traits of character (Trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring, and citizenship)
- Create a Word collage or PowerPoint presentation depicting the traits of character. Provide captions under each photo to name and/or explain the photo as it applies to each character trait.
- Attach the collage or presentation document to an email to the instructor.

Activity 3.

Exciting, interactive bulletin boards, informative newsletters and bookmarks are created monthly. Families are invited to participate in all activities. Articles, suggestions and additional information is placed in the monthly school newsletter for family use. Families are provided appropriate conversation starters, story ideas, and discussion questions to maximize mealtime and bed time discussions.

Activity 4.

Daily Homework E-mail: Parents receive daily notification each afternoon of student homework and responsibilities. This effective strategy provides on-going

communication and support from parents regarding assignments, responsibilities, school-wide initiatives, and student accomplishments.

Activity 5.

To help the sense of responsibility, below questions can be discussed:

- What are your responsibilities as a student? at home?
- What responsibilities will you assume as you get older?
- How do you hold others accountable for their behaviour?
- How do you hold yourself accountable for your behaviour?

Thomas Lickona discusses classroom strategies that individual teachers can use. These strategies are listed below along with three school-wide strategies.

3.2. Classroom Strategies

In classroom practice, a comprehensive approach to character building calls upon the *individual teacher* to:

1-Act as a caregiver, model, and mentor: Treat students with love and respect, setting a good example, supporting pro-social behaviour, and correcting hurtful actions through one-on-one guidance and whole-class discussion.

2- Create a moral community: Help students know each other as persons, respect and care about each other, and feel valued membership in, and responsibility to, the group.

3-Practice moral discipline: Use the creation and enforcement of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, voluntary compliance with rules, and a generalized respect for others.

4-Create a democratic classroom environment: Involve students in collaborative decision-making and shared responsibility for making the classroom a good place to be and learn.

5-Teach character through the curriculum: Use the ethically rich content of academic subjects (such as literature, history, and science) as a vehicle for studying the virtues; ensure that the sex, drugs, and alcohol education programs promote self-control and other high character standards taught elsewhere in the curriculum (e.g., Napier, 1996, and National Guidelines for Sexuality and Character Education, 1996).

6- *Use cooperative learning*: Through collaborative work, develop students' appreciation of others, perspective taking, and ability to work toward common goals.

7- *Develop the "conscience of craft"*: Foster students' valuing of learning, capacity for working hard, commitment to excellence, and public sense of work as affecting the lives of others.

8- *Encourage moral reflection*: Foster moral thinking and thoughtful decision-making through reading, research, essay writing, journaling, discussion, and debate.

9- *Teach conflict resolution*: Help students acquire the moral skills of solving conflicts fairly and without force (Thomas Lickona, 1992).

4. CONCLUSION

The development of socialization skills and integration of character education are an important part of a child's academic success. Character education efforts may be effective when implemented rigorously and with a scientific foundation. Schools should focus on teaching character within the regular curriculum.

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