

Moral and Character Development
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Character Education

When we say that a person has character, we usually mean they have distinguishing moral qualities, moral virtues, and moral reasoning abilities. Less frequently used terms include *morality*, *virtue*, and *ethics*. A moral person understands right and wrong and willfully chooses what is right; a virtuous person engages in good behavior intentionally, predictably, and habitually; an ethical person figures out what is right or good when this is not obvious. As we begin the 21st century in America, there appears to be a desire to reconsider earlier goals of American education by taking character building more seriously. Most people share the view that schools should be formally and strategically involved in building moral character, virtues, and ethical behavior and should work in concert with parents and the community (Elam, Rose & Gallup, 1993; Hayes & Hagedorn, 2000).

Looking Back

From the beginning of written history, the importance of building moral character has been recognized by parents, educators, and concerned citizens in every culture and society. Between 1640 and 1940, educators in the United States were as concerned about moral education as academic education (McClelland, 1992). Throughout this 300-year period, the dominant pedagogical method was inculcation (repetitive direct instruction combined with reinforced practice), and the goals were inspiration, commitment, and habituation. During the early 1900s, John Dewey and other progressive educators expanded those goals to include critical thinking and reflection about values and morals; they stressed the value of experiential learning for building character. In 1951, the National Education Association (NEA) recommended combining these traditional and progressive approaches. This was not accomplished because concerns about academic competence and teaching specific values caused character education to be put aside as a formal undertaking. Public schools abandoned the dual

focus on moral character and academic success and adopted a singular focus on academics.

Character education continued informally through the hidden curriculum of western democratic values and the independent efforts of teachers.

Between 1940 and 1970, cognitive-developmental psychologists (e.g., Kohlberg, 1984) generated some renewed interest in character by identifying levels of moral reasoning and trying to accelerate moral development. The more widely adopted values clarification movement (e.g., Simon, Howe & Kirschenbaum, 1972) was a response to the nation's preoccupation with individual freedom and self-improvement and the nationalistic push for better science and math education. A third influence was built on the work of Erikson (1961, 1980) and Havighurst (1953) who identified processes and stages of socioemotional development. Affective-developmental psychologists (Hoffman, 1982, 1983; Kagan, 1984) and moral philosophers concerned with conscience and emotion (Gilligan, 1987; Green, 1984, 1999) began to expand our understanding of affective moral development.

Public concern about a moral decline in society and the disintegration of families and communities led to the re-emergence of character education in the 1980s. By 1995, it had become a social movement with thousands of schools and communities involved. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, proponents of traditional and progressive approaches engaged in a friendly dialogue that energized the movement and accelerated the synthesis of ideas. Schools drew strategies from both approaches with little regard for the theoretical foundation for this synthesis. They taught and trained students using stories, moral exemplars, reinforcement, and lists of virtues as recommended by traditionalists; they provided active student experiences within caring communities through class meetings, cooperative learning, and service learning as recommended by progressives.

Many important contributions to character education occurred during the final two decades of the 20th century. In 1992, representatives from many organizations devoted to building the civic virtue and moral character of students formed the Character Education Partnership (CEP, <http://www.character.org/>). According to CEP's 11 principles (Lickona, Schaps & Lewis, 2000), effective character education schools:

1. Promote core ethical values as the basis of good character.
2. Define character comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and behavior.
3. Promote core values intentionally and proactively through all parts of school life.
4. Are caring communities.
5. Give students opportunities for moral action.
6. Have meaningful and challenging academic curriculums that respect learners.
7. Develop students' intrinsic motivation.
8. Have professionals who exemplify core values and maintain a moral community.
9. Require moral leadership from educators and students.
10. Recruit parents and community members as full partners.
11. Evaluate school character, student character, and adults as character educators.

The Eclectic Ideal

Research and practice suggest that the most effective character education schools combine direct instruction, modeling, reinforcement, and various community-building strategies (class meetings, service learning, cooperative learning, intercultural exchange, social skills training, and caring interpersonal support) to promote the development of moral virtues, moral reasoning, and other assets that make the will and ability to do what is right and good probable (Duncan, 1997; Vessels, 1998; Williams, 2000). They are concerned with all aspects of

development including social, emotional, moral, intellectual, and academic. They are child-need-centered without abandoning the responsibility to transmit core ethical values to youth. They endorse Heslep's (1995) view that character education includes civic education (learning about laws, government, and citizenship), social education (learning social roles, responsibilities, and skills), prudential education (learning how to take care of oneself), cultural education (becoming historically and culturally literate), and moral education—the latter providing a context of principles that guide civic, social, prudential, and cultural education.

Good character educators are aware of the overlapping and interconnected parts of the moral person: knowledge, understanding, reasoning, autonomy, values, beliefs, standards, principles, perspective taking, conscience, empathy, emotion, virtues, intentions, will, commitment, motivation, duty, behavior, and habits. Berkowitz's (1995) model of the complete moral person includes moral values (beliefs and attitudes with an affective component), moral behavior (intentional moral acts), moral emotion (energizing feelings), moral character (a personality characteristic), moral identity (being or trying to be moral), and metamoral characteristics like self-discipline. Lickona's (1993) moral feeling, thinking, and action, and Ryan's (1996) knowing, loving, and doing the good are perhaps easier to remember and use. Huitt's (2000) model treats moral will or volition as a part distinguishable from moral emotion, moral thought, and moral behavior.

Green (1999) connects the thinking and feeling parts of the moral person by describing five voices of conscience (craft, membership, responsibility, memory, and imagination). Kagan (1984) explains how several specific moral emotions compel adherence to standards of right and wrong beginning in early childhood. Many define moral behavior in terms of specific virtues or habits of conduct from which inner parts of the moral person can be inferred (Krajewski &

Bailey, 1999). Vessels (1998) distinguishes between primary virtues that reflect personal integrity (e.g., kindness, courage, ability, and effort) and primary virtues that reflect social integrity (e.g., friendship, teamwork, and citizenship). He incorporates elaborations of these virtues and theoretical propositions about moral-developmental processes into behavioral objectives for various age groups.

Early Twenty-First Century

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the time devoted to character education in many schools is decreasing due to the popular focus on academic standards, accountability, standardized testing, and whole-school reform. The well-researched whole-school reform models that include character education are not among the most popular: Basic Schools (Boyer, 1995), Child Development Project (Solomon, Schaps, Watson & Battistich, 1992; www.devstu.org/), Modern Red School House (<http://www.mrsh.org/>), Positive Action (<http://www.positiveaction.net/>), Responsive Classroom (Elliot, 1995; <http://www.responsiveclassroom.org>), School Development Program (Comer, 2001, 1997; <http://www.yale.edu/comer/>), Expeditionary Learning/Outward Bound (<http://www.elob.org/>). In general, American society may not be ready to think in terms of preventing social problems and improving schools by implementing a curriculum that balances character education and academic instruction, and the addition of nontraditional assessment measures that document products and processes reflecting good character and character growth such as Huitt's (2001) proposed use of cumulative electronic portfolios with scanned pictures and video clips.

Trends and concerns at the turn of the century suggest that in order for character education to become a highly valued and fully integrated feature of education once again, character educators will have to focus on reducing societal problems and address concerns about

the effectiveness of academic instruction in the schools. Barring a major shift in priorities, the future of character education appears to hinge on the evaluation of its potential for reducing school violence, drug use, teen pregnancy, disrespect, and prejudice, and improving school climate, student discipline, school safety, intercultural understanding, and academic achievement. Models for this type of program evaluation research are now available (Battistich et al., 1989 and 1995; Benninga, 1991; Benson, 1997; Etzioni, 1984; Ginsburg & Hanson, 1986; Hinck & Brandell, 1999; Leming, 1997; Schaeffer, 1998; Scott, 1992; Vessels, 1999). Leaders in education are not likely to change course unless research results show that academic goals are achievable using a curriculum that addresses all aspects of development thereby integrating academic and character goals, objectives, and methods.

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