

Character Education: A Growing Need in American Schools

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According to the CEP's Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education, the term, *Character Education* is defined as "widely shared, pivotally important, core ethical values." Those core ethical values include caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, respect for self and others, diligence, a strong worth ethic, and perseverance. The actual values taught in a character education curriculum vary depending on the creator. Some character education curriculums use skits, animal friends, and books to teach children values. Others involve role playing or responding to videos. Most character education programs are centered on developing a well-rounded child with a strong sense of values and a moral compass to guide them through life. It is about shaping children's minds, attitudes, and behaviors.

Character education in the public school setting had diminished over the years. The focus has turned to content area instruction and test scores. The push for high scores in the content areas has caused character education to be less of a priority within the curriculum. Students often receive "character education" from the school counselor for approximately thirty minutes a week or every other week or occasionally as problems arise. Society has changed drastically throughout history. Students twenty years ago behaved differently than the students of today. The family unit has also changed considerably. Students do not seem to be getting the same core, moral, and character values that were previously taught by the parents. Therefore it has been left up to the schools to fill in the gap.

Teachers implement a lot of character education daily to solve problems within the classroom. They teach children right from wrong, how to work together, and be respectful to each other and adults. Students need character education to be able to function in the school setting as well as in daily life outside of school. When students do not have guidance from their parents the responsibility should then fall on the school system.

Character education should be more prominent in today's public school curriculum. Students need morals and values to guide them through life. Teaching students these values would allow for more time to be spent on the core content areas and less time solving simple problems of hurt feelings and bad behaviors. Students need to learn by example and have character education as part of the curriculum instead of watching a video about a character word. They need to be taught how to act and think as it relates to the people and environments around them in order to function successfully in society.

Current character education trends involve short lessons a few times a month or even once a month. That is not enough for children to learn good character traits. I believe character education should be incorporated and integrated into the current curriculum. It should be a daily discussion with students. The teachers, staff, and parents should also model and backup the expected behaviors. Character education would make school life easier and more productive.

According to Diana Brannon (2008), author of *Character Education-A Joint Responsibility*, "character education programs have a positive effect on achievement, classroom behaviors, and long-term test scores." She also stated that character education helps create a calmer and more caring atmosphere that helps children focus on learning. Brannon also says that "society condones many behaviors that are unacceptable in the classroom. Therefore, children often are confused or uncertain about appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a group setting."

In Dr. Kevin Costley's review of Charles Silberman's "Crisis in the Classroom, the Remaking of American Education" (2009) it was stated that schools have failed to develop students who are self-disciplined and have self-respect. This lack of respect makes behavior problems more prominent in the classroom.

The Character Education Partnership (CEP) has eleven principles of effective character education. One of the principles is that character education creates a caring school community (Lickona, 2007). The CEP also says that “a school committed to character strives to become a microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society.” During this course of study students develop caring relationships among students, among staff, and between staff and families. It fosters the students’ desire to be a good person. The CEP also points out that through repeated moral experiences, students develop and practice the skills and behavioral habits that make up the action side of character.

Calmer students are able to spend more on task and stay focused during the day (Brannon, 2008). This allows for more quality learning experiences. More hands-on, active lessons and activities would be possible. The school day would be much smoother and less stressful for teachers, students, and parents. Students would spend less time out of class because of discipline problems and more time in the classroom learning. Character education is about social interactions. Students have to be able to behave appropriately in social settings.

Many parents are no longer making character education an important part of their family experiences. Students watch more television and play video games that interacting with family members. This means that students are not getting what they need for a basic moral back ground at home. If teachers and administrators want better behaviors and performances from students then character education needs to be a part of the everyday curriculum. Students need to learn how to be respectful and care for others feelings and belongings. Character education would help to alleviate some of the disruptions in the classroom. They will in turn learn to have self-discipline and know good behaviors from bad behaviors.

This issue is a vital issue in today's world of more and more of eroding families! Character education is imperative to the functioning of our society. If people do not know how to act, then our society will fall apart. Prisons and detention centers would be filled past capacity. Students need to know how to act in order to function and be successful. Students need to be able to focus in class in order to learn. Those that lack good behavior can cause disruptions for the ones that have self-discipline. The education system needs character education to be able to educate students and make them a success.

Teaching students is challenging enough without adding in additional behavior problems and student related issues related to character education. Students need to learn how to behave, respect each other, and interact with their peers. If students could work together and get along then teachers could focus more on teaching the core subjects and less on settling petty disputes and worrying about moral, ethical issues. Teaching students how to act and respond to situations is a life-long skill. They are learning how to function and cooperate with others.

Studies have shown that schools with character education often have higher test scores and have less discipline issues. This is because students are able to spend more time on-task and less time being distracted by behavior problems.

In Conclusion

Character education should not be eliminated from the school curriculum. It is an essential part of student's ability to learn and a teachers' ability to teach. Character education develops self-discipline and self-respect. It also fosters a student's ability to show respect and empathy towards others. They learn right from wrong and to think about their actions and consequences.

When students have values and morals it allows the teacher to devote her time to learning instead of dealing with discipline. The students are less distracted and more engaged in the learning process. They learn to be cooperative with teachers, students, and staff. They learn how to work together and problem solve.

Character education is essential to the development of well-rounded individuals. Due to changes in society, family structure, and acceptable norms outside of a school setting, character education is now becoming a necessary part of everyday curriculum. Behavior issues are on the rise and students are not learning effective tools within the family setting. Schools are becoming a bigger influence in the development of children's moral compass. They need guidance and a strong character education program can provide them with ways to deal with problems and think about their actions. This guidance should also be encouraged, supported, and modeled by the parents.

Character education is a must in order for schools to continue to be positive, productive learning environments.

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