

**CHARACTER EDUCATION:
ITS PLACE IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

KLA White Paper

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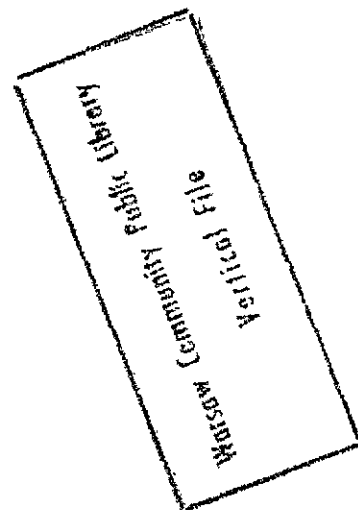
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CHARACTER EDUCATION

Definition

Many use the term "character education" interchangeably with "values education" and "ethics education". There are, however, differences between each of these terms. Ethics education teaches the philosophy of human conduct with emphasis on the determination of right and wrong. Values education teaches the intrinsic worth of something. It is society which determines which beliefs or standards are desirable, worthy or right. Character education, however, is the education of our young people in the high moral qualities that are expected of everyone; its emphasis is on positive moral force. Here we are referring to character education as it relates to the moral development of our children. Theoretically, a comprehensive character education program would produce students who understand moral character and who not only can identify good and bad (right and wrong), but who want to do good and avoid bad. Thus the training would be incorporated into their own actions.

Early History of Character Education

Character education in the field of education is not something new. If we would travel back as far as Aristotle and Plato we would see that in their belief character education, the teaching of ethics, was a must for students. In his article "The Return of Character Education", Dr. Thomas Lickona outlines how early education dealt with character education. Early education had two major goals. The first goal was to help

people become smart; the second goal was to help them become "good". He quotes Theodore Roosevelt in saying, "to educate a person in mind and not in morals is to educate a menace to society." In keeping with this line of thought, early America used the Bible as a public school source book for both moral and religious instruction. As time passed, the Bible became a bone of contention, as did its successor, the infamous McGuffey Readers.

Character education began to crumble in the twentieth century. Some believe that Darwin's introduction of the theory of evolution led many people to believe that all things, including morality, were evolving and in a state of flux. The philosophy of logical positivism further contributed to the decline; Lickona describes this as a radical distinction between facts, which can be scientifically proven, and values, which are more an expression of feeling and not objective truths. As a result of this positivism, morality was up for grabs as well.

Lickona points out that the 1960's, the era of the "me" philosophy, gave rise to personalism, which celebrates the worth, autonomy and subjectivity of the person, emphasizing individual rights and freedom without responsibility. While this era did correctly protest societal oppression and injustice, it went too far and tended toward the weakening of moral authority, objective moral norms, weakened social commitment.

In addition, America's own makeup, a pluralistic society, is a contributing factor. Americans are overly concerned at times about the separation of church and state which has resulted, in some circumstances, in dumping the baby out with the bath water. American educators have been confronted many times by various entities and have been

careful to ensure they do not offend in the area of church and state. As a result, in our opinion, some educators have abandoned their responsibility to help students develop strong, positive character traits.

In the 1970's, the values clarification movement tried to avoid that dilemma of teaching some else's values by simply assisting students in developing their own knowledge of and ability to choose what was of value to them. While educators may have succeeded in developing the reasoning process to make good moral decisions, students often were not given enough objective basic values with which to work. As a result, many basic human values were assumed but not taught.

Growing Interest

In the last few years the concept of character education being taught in public school has become a topic of discussion by more and more groups throughout the nation. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, one of the world's most influential educational associations, brought together some of the more important writers and thinkers in the field of character education for its November 1993 journal. Since that time the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development) and the Character Educational Partnership published a book written by Henry A. Huffman, an assistant superintendent for instruction in the Mount Lebanon School District in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Since that time Dr. Huffman has begun working full time in the field of character education because of the great demand. The American Association of School Administrators has also joined in the effort to bring character education into the

public schools and has invested much time to bring character education needs to the attention of administrators throughout our nation. Another player in this whole effort of character education is the Josephson Institute, a public benefit, non-partisan, non-profit membership organization which advocates principled reasoning and ethical decision making. This group has not only conducted programs and workshops but has also developed a coalition membership with approximately 60 organizational members such as the American Red Cross and the National Association of State Boards of Education.

Several school districts throughout the country are incorporating character education into their overall educational program. The Conestoga Valley School District (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) and the Mount Lebanon School District (south of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania) integrated character education into their existing educational program in 1991 and 1988, respectively. Among the many things that they learned was the importance of communicating with their community and staff throughout the implementation process.

Reasons for Character Education

Certain people renowned in the educational arena have studied the concept of character education. Persons such as Dr. Thomas Lickona, Dr. Diana Berreth, and Michael Josephson, have developed numerous reasons to pursue such. While all of the concepts do not jibe, the most predominant follow:

1. The Deterioration of the Behavior of Our Youth
 - increased violence, even disrespect

2. The Duty of Civilization to Teach Values to Its Young
 - not just one person's duty
3. Continual Decline of Teaching Basic Core Values and Absence of Role Models for the Young
 - children getting less and less help in distinguishing "good" from "bad"
4. Democratic Society's Need for Its Citizenry to Identify and Carry Out Acceptable Actions.
 - increasing self-centeredness in youth accompanied by a declining sense of civic responsibility
5. Increased Self-Destructiveness of Our Youth
 - rising substance abuse and suicide
6. Character Education is Inherent in Schools.
 - "keep your hands to yourself"
 - "keep your eyes on your own paper"
7. Business and Politics Promote Character Education
 - necessary in good citizens and productive employees

We see evidence of a desire for character education in our own school community and the greater Warsaw area. At the recent Greater Warsaw Chamber of Commerce Educational Summit, business and community leaders felt that character and character education are of the utmost importance for potential employees and leaders. There is currently a sub-committee working on that particular area in the Warsaw Chamber Education Committee. Recent *Times Union* articles have expounded on the subject as well, noting that a 1930's law mandates character education.

Identification of Values

In the past, the issue of which specific values are to be interwoven with school curriculum has provided a convenient excuse for communities which did not care to deal

with the matter at all. Basically, public schools should teach those values upon which there is general consensus in a given community. A growing number of cases, however, prove that communities can readily ascertain several basic values to incorporate in the education of our young.

The Mount Lebanon School District, for instance, developed the following:

1. Respect human dignity.
2. Demonstrate active responsibility for the welfare of others.
3. Integrate individual interest and social responsibilities.
4. Demonstrate integrity.
5. Apply moral principles when making choices and judgments.
6. Seek peaceful resolution of conflict.

In New Mexico, the "Albuquerque Model" was developed which advocates the following:

1. Trustworthiness
2. Respect
3. Responsibility
4. Justice and fairness
5. Caring
6. Civic virtue and citizenship.

These have become known as the "Six Pillars of Character".

Numerous other communities have invested (and are in the process of investing) vast amounts of time in coming to a consensus as to what values should be taught/reinforced in school. Other categories approved include integrity, compassion, courage, commitment and appreciation of diversity. These communities include cities and towns such as Akron, Ohio, Jacksonville, Florida, Atlanta, Georgia and Edina, Minnesota. Regardless of the locations, it is fair to say that the general public can concur that there are certain basic character traits which should be instilled in our young; further,

it is appropriate for the public schools to reinforce these certain traits.

Issues

It is with the foregoing history in mind that we have developed three issues to address:

- I. While parents' opinions may differ as to many values, are there certain basic character traits which should be taught to our children in Kosciusko County?
- II. Do parents in Kosciusko County believe such basic character traits should be taught in our schools?
- III. Do parents believe that these basic character traits are being taught satisfactorily in Kosciusko County schools at the present time?

With information/research regarding these issues, the Kosciusko County schools will have better information to deal with character education in the future.

The Procedure - Data Gathering

To gather information regarding the relevant issues, we constructed a survey (a copy of which is attached hereto as Exhibit A) directed to parents of elementary school children. This age group was chosen for two primary reasons. First, we were most likely to get an adequate response rate from this age group. Students in elementary school are accustomed to taking documents home for parents to review and return. High-schoolers would be much more likely to either throw the survey away immediately or fail to return it (in the event the survey actually made it home and was completed). Also, high-school students would be more likely to complete the surveys themselves in an attempt at humor, thus skewing the results. And secondly, these are the most formative years.

ANONYMOUS SURVEY

Dear Parent(s):

Character Education in public school is a topic currently being discussed and considered in many schools. Basically, teaching character means teaching our young people to be good students, good employees, and good citizens. It involves the training of certain values upon which, hopefully, all members of the community agree.

The Kosciusko Leadership Academy is presently taking the following survey to help the Kosciusko Community Schools determine how to best meet the needs and desires of our community. Your help in completing these questions and returning them to your child's teacher or principal by Friday, February 10, 1995 would be greatly appreciated.

1. How many children do you have attending public school in Kosciusko County? _____
2. Do you believe that character education is important? _____ Yes _____ No
3. Character education is: _____ More Important _____ Less Important _____ As important as academics such as math, science and English.
4. Should children be taught:

Trustworthiness?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Respect?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Responsibility?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Justice and Fairness?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Caring?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Citizenship?	_____ Yes	_____ No
Honesty?	_____ Yes	_____ No

Other: Please specify: _____
5. Who should be responsible for teaching these values? _____
6. Should these values be taught in public schools? _____ Yes _____ No
If so, should it be taught in a separate class? _____ Yes _____ No
Or, should it be incorporated in all classes? _____ Yes _____ No
7. Do you believe these values are already being taught satisfactorily in public schools in Kosciusko County:
_____ Yes _____ No
Please explain: _____

8. What is your occupation? _____
9. What is your spouse's occupation? _____
10. What grades does your child (children) receive?
_____ As _____ Bs _____ Cs _____ Ds _____ Fs

School administrators distributed the surveys on Monday, February 6, 1995, with instructions to parents to return them by Friday, February 10, 1995. Of 6405 surveys distributed, 1,453 were returned, for a 23% response rate. Considering that the average survey yields a 2% response, we are confident that the responses accurately represent the feelings of our community.¹

The Results.

First, it is important to note that 98.5% of the responding surveys agreed that character education (in general) is important. In addition, parents' priorities in regard to academics and character training are exhibited by a 79.21% response that the two are equally important.

Question Number 4 on the survey revealed a general consensus that the basic traits suggested should be taught to children (by someone). The following table exhibits the extent of concurrence.

<u>Trait</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Agreeing Trait Should be Taught</u>
Trustworthiness	97.72%
Respect	98.27%
Responsibility	98.21%
Justice and Fairness	98.14%

¹ While we have seen no evidence of survey results being skewed, one must note that if a family had more than one child in elementary school, it is possible that the family may have returned more than one survey. This does not change the percentages discussed herein as related to the number of children attending Kosciusko County schools. However, a survey regarding the number of families could vary somewhat.

Caring	98.07%
Citizenship	98.21%
Honesty	98.21%

The crux of the survey lies in the responses to question number 6 which asks whether these values should be taught in public schools. An overwhelming majority of the respondents, 90.22%, maintain that such is appropriate. Only 5.10% of the respondents answered in the negative and the remainder gave no response.

As for the structure of any such instruction, two options were provided to the respondents. Only twenty-one percent (21%) of the respondents thought a separate class regarding character traits should be taught, while eight-five and a half percent (85.5%) believed that reinforcement of these values should be incorporated in all classes as an inherent part of the curriculum.²

Finally, we come to the issue of the parents' perceptions regarding the present character training in Kosciusko County schools. The following table illustrates the categories of responses to the question, "Do you believe these values are already being taught satisfactorily in public schools in Kosciusko County?"

<u>Response</u>	<u>Percentage of Total Responses</u>
Yes	39.43%
No	38.00%

² Note: Respondents on several surveys answered affirmatively to the ideas of both a separate class and mere incorporation in all classes. Judging by the overall tone of most of those and additional comments by the respondents, it is the testers' opinion that the majority of these believe it most appropriate for values to be inherent in all curriculum.

Somewhat	3.23%
No Response	19.34%

In interpreting the results of the survey it is important to examine the responses in the proper light. While an overwhelming majority of respondents believe that the schools should implement character training, the role of the schools is not to be that of the sole proponents of value education. In responding to the open-ended question, "Who should be responsible for teaching these values?", the following replies were submitted:³

<u>Entity</u>	<u>Percentage of Respondents Believing Entity is Responsible for Contributing to Character Training</u>
Family/Parents	81.0%
School/Teachers/Administration	60.9%
Church	6.04%
Community/Any Adult in Daily Contact	8.11%

Several comments will further aid in one's evaluation of the survey. First, more than 70% of the respondents listed more than one entity as being responsible for the impartment of basic values to our children. Of those, 99% listed family/parent in combination with other entities. School/teachers were listed in approximately 95% of the various combinations. Comments by those surveyed, however, made it clear that it is primarily the parents' responsibility to teach these basic values. The schools, on the other hand, should reinforce these ideals.

³ The majority of respondents listed more than one responsible entity. The percentage reflected in the table sets forth the percentage of respondents listing that particular entity.

Conclusion

Our survey results clearly coincide with the experiences of areas like Mount Vernon and Edina. There are certain basic character traits which the community at large agrees should be instilled in our youth. Kosciusko County parents concur on traits such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, justice and fairness, caring, citizenship, and honesty being taught in public schools. While some believe that this is already being done satisfactorily, there is not an overwhelming consensus. Therefore, it would behoove the school system to work closely with the community in order to develop a strategy (agreeable to a strong majority) to implement appropriate character education techniques.

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