



# **NUTS AND BOLTS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION**

**A LITERATURE REVIEW BY LAUREE BETH STEDJE**

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# Nuts and Bolts of Character Education

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## Introduction

*“Teachers and schools tend to mistake good behavior for good character. What they prize is docility, suggestibility, the child who will do what he is told; or even better, the child who will do what is wanted without even having to be told. They value most in children what children least value in themselves. Small wonder that their effort to build character is such a failure; they don’t know it when they see it.” —John Holt “How Children Fail”<sup>1</sup>*

The past fifteen years have seen a resurgence of character education within American schools. Character education encompasses a broad range of definitions, and numerous character education programs and curriculums have been developed to address the perceived and real need for addressing character-based issues in the classroom.

Many questions surround the subject of character education and its effectiveness in the classroom—partly due to the lack of empirical evidence linking character education to specific improvements in academics, social interactions, and emotional and cognitive development.

This literature review explores some of the common questions asked regarding character education—such as, funding, accessibility, and relevance. It also includes research that defines character education, explores the results of several character education programs, and relates the differences in implementation strategies. Most of the results relate case study findings conducted between 1995 and 2001 under the U.S. Department of Education Partnerships in Character Education.<sup>2</sup> However, some were conducted under other grants.

## What Is Character Education?

Character education should not be defined without first defining “character.” Character is the culmination of habits, resulting from the ethical choices, behaviors, and attitudes an individual makes, and is the “moral excellence” an individual exhibits when no one is watching. It includes an individual’s desire to do one’s best, concern for others’ well-being, cognition of critical thinking and moral reasoning, and the development of interpersonal and emotional skills that allow individuals the capability to work effectively with each other in everyday situations.<sup>3</sup> Thomas Lickona defines *character* as “knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good.”<sup>4</sup>

“Character education” broadly defined can include anything from “values clarification,” to citizenship, to moral guidance. More narrowly defined, character education refers to a specific style of moral teaching.<sup>5</sup> Alfie Kohn defines character education as a reflection of

“particular values as well as particular assumptions about the nature of children and how they learn.”<sup>6</sup> Consequently, character education addresses the cognitive, affective, and behavioral aspects of education,<sup>7</sup> and utilizes all dimensions of school life to foster character development.<sup>8</sup>



Lawrence Kohlberg and Richard H. Hersh wrote, “Whether we like it or not, schooling is a moral enterprise. Values issues abound in the content and process of teaching.”<sup>9</sup> Whether designated to a specific time in the classroom or fully integrated into a school’s curriculum, character education occurs each minute in the classroom. The presence or absence of a specific curriculum does not negate the fact that children learn character by observing how teachers and administrators handle conflict, interruptions, disruptive children, disrespectful students, schedule changes, and the myriad situations that occur each day.

Character education should not be considered a tool that conforms children to unthinking compliance. Character development is more than developing good behavior—but rather identifying and cultivating a set of inter- and intrapersonal skills that provide the framework to build and execute ethical behavior and build community.<sup>10</sup>

## Is Character Education Really Necessary?

Many questions surrounding character education voice valid concerns. Parents desire that classroom values reflect the values taught at home, and diverse beliefs shape how communities support character education.

In recent years, instances of school violence, disrespect, general lack of manners, bullying has grown and educators believe it could be linked to a lack of values being taught at home.

The **American Family Policy Council** reported in 1990 that children spend 33.4 hours engaged in meaningful conversation with parents, 1,500 hours watching television, and 900 hours in the classroom each year.<sup>11</sup>

The **Center for Disease Control and Prevention** reported:

- Approximately 38% of public schools reported at least one incident of violence to police in 2005–2006.
- Approximately 27% of students reported gangs at their schools in 2007.
- Approximately 10% of city school teachers, 6% of suburban teachers, and 5% of rural teachers reported threats of injury by students from 2003–2004.
- In 2006, schools reported 29 violent crimes per 1,000 students including rape, sexual and aggravated assault, and robbery.
- In 2007, approximately 32% reported being bullied, and 4% reported being cyber-bullied.<sup>12</sup>

According a 2007 Center for Disease Control Survey taken by 9<sup>th</sup>–12<sup>th</sup> graders:

- 5.9% carried a weapon on school property within 30 days prior to the survey.

- 7.8% had been threatened or injured with a weapon within 12 months prior to the survey.
- 12.4% were in a physical fight on school property during 12 months prior the survey.
- 22.3% were offered, sold, or given an illegal drug by someone on school property within 12 months prior the survey.<sup>13</sup>

Educators believe these numbers indicate the need for integrating character education into schools.

## What Are the Benefits of Character Education?

Results vary widely depending on each school’s degree of implementation. Schools that employ a higher level of integration see more significant results than schools that use minimal levels of integration.

This review is not exhaustive, and the results listed below are taken from larger studies conducted in various school districts across the United States. Curricula, implementation, and funding varied from study to study. Each school district measured specific indicators they would monitor as it related to the character education implementation levels.



### Kansas

The Topeka, Kansas (USD 501) school district integrated *Character First* character education and staff development for grades K–12, which included parental involvement, and mentors, as well as the greater Topeka community. Students, staff, and parents at the 4<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, and 9<sup>th</sup> grade levels completed surveys over a four-year period (2003–2007). The results included:

- The number of students setting educational goals increased from 50% to 95% from 2004–2007.
- Attendance rates increased from 92% to 96.8% (based on unexcused absences).
- The number of 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade students in setting character goals totaled approximately 4,000 the last two years of the grant. (2006–2007)
- Graduation rates increased from 76% to 81%.
- The yearly total for suspensions decreased from 3,641 to 2,434.
- Discipline referrals decreased from 13,548 to 10,380.
- The Austin Peters Group surveys showed a modest increase in more positive attitudes in 5 out of 6 middle schools, and the higher implementation schools showed more positive results than low implementation schools.
- While there was no significant difference in parent-staff responses, parents noted “upward positive effects on their students’ academic achievement, work ethic, responsibility, quality of life, and self-control.”<sup>14</sup>

### Missouri

Between October 2002 and September 2006, Missouri measured the implementation of several character education programs. The first study randomly selected 64 schools and evaluated the results from the implementation of the *CharacterPlus Way*. The schools

were first categorized by school district and then stratified according to socio-economic levels and size. Survey data was collected each year from staff, parents, 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. The results included:

- Staff perceived a slight increase in students' sense of belonging from 61% to 63%.
- Staff and parent relationships improved from 75% to 81% in high implementation schools.
- Staff perceptions of leadership improved from 66% to 71%. (Staff took more active roles, better organization, better availability of needed resources, and more staff involvement in decision making processes, greater interest in new ideas and innovation.)
- Discipline referrals decreased by 41% in high implementation schools.
- This study attributed the culture change of the project schools to the 66% improvement in math achievement and 79% improvement in communication arts achievement, indicating that the high level of character education implementation significantly improved the school culture.<sup>15</sup>

The second Missouri study selected 40 schools in the St. Louis school district and implemented the *Caring School Community: The CharacterPlus Way Project* from October 2002 to September 2006. Results included:

- The perception of having safer and more orderly schools increased from 69% to 75%.
- Between 2004–2006, student discipline referrals decreased by 19% in schools with implementation while the control schools without implementation saw a 12% increase in discipline referrals.
- Time allowed for staff and program development and implementation increased from 63% to 72%.
- Classroom discussion on how values affect students' behavior, set classroom standards and plan after school activities, increased from 57% to 69%.
- This study attributed the culture change in the *Caring School Community* schools to the 80% improvement in math achievement and 86% improvement in communication arts achievement, indicating that the high level of character education implementation significantly improved the school culture.<sup>16</sup>

A third study, *ShowMe Character*, conducted in conjunction with the previous two studies, evaluated the character education implementation in 42 data-producing schools in a semi-rural district. This program was conducted from August 2004 to July 2006, and survey data was collected from parents, certified staff, and 3<sup>rd</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, and 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. This program showed that significant results can occur in short-term and long-term treatments.

- Schools that implemented the character program saw a 35% decrease in discipline referrals.
- The schools environment improved as orderly and emotionally and academically safe from 68% to 75%.
- Leadership support increased from 53% to 63%.
- Improved partnerships between staff and parents, student collaboration, and student perceptions of personal competence from 60% to 67%.
- Staff collaboration on instructional planning, sharing ideas and strategies, teamwork, and reflecting on the results of instructional activities increased from 61% to 71%.<sup>17</sup>

## Alabama

Baldwin County began a character initiative through the Alabama State Department of Education, and data was collected from all 48 Baldwin County schools from 2005–2008. Results included:

- Staff surveys indicated an improved overall school climate from 67% to 86%.
- Survey data from 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders indicated an overall improved school climate from 57% to 94%.
- Parent survey indicated overall school climate improvement from 67% to 87%.
- The data also indicated that the relationship between the level of implementation corresponded with the improvement of school climate in the schools.
- Survey data indicated that Baldwin County students met and exceeded state academic standards in math each year from 2005–2008.<sup>18</sup>

## Massachusetts

The Massachusetts Character Education Pilot Program (2000–2005) showed significant improvement with each year of the character education initiative and involved 11 schools. The results from Brighton High School included:

- Brighton High School's retention rate started at 11.3% in 2001, rose to 15.1% in 2002, and dropped to 6.1% in 2004.
- Brighton High School's enrollment grew from 1,133 students in 2000 to 1,327 students in 2005, and the dropout rate fell from 12.5% to 9.6%.
- In 2000, 68% of Brighton 10<sup>th</sup> grade students failed English Language Arts. By 2004, the number of failing students totaled 25%.
- In 2000, 87% of Brighton 10<sup>th</sup> grade students failed Mathematics. By 2004, only 17% failed mathematics.<sup>19</sup>



## Minnesota

A research team from the University of Minnesota designed the *Community Voices and Character Education Project* and collaborated with educators across Minnesota. Program schools saw some improvement, and results included:

- 50% of staff respondents perceived improved discipline policies.
- Between 30% and 40% of staff respondents reported improved student and teacher attitudes toward the school, increased sense of community and school pride, wider community involvement, and decreased student classroom misbehavior.
- Suspensions decreased, ranging from 8% to 23% improvement.
- Detentions decreased, ranging from 8% to 33% improvement.
- Misbehaviors decreased, ranging from 17% to 54% improvement.
- Absenteeism decreased, ranging from 7% to 17% improvement.<sup>20</sup>

## Oregon

The Oregon Department of Education also conducted a character initiative from 1999–2003, and involved 33 schools in 6 school districts. Each district developed its own character education program and implemented it according to its specific needs. The districts experienced a decrease in disciplinary referrals, ranging from 31% to 62% improvement over 5 years.<sup>21</sup> They reported some of the most effective results from these practices:

- No single program can address all the needs for each school involved. Some programs work for a couple of years, and then a different program is needed to “grow” with the school.
- Data collecting helped the administration make better decisions and tailor the programs to the specific needs of each school and class.
- Most initiatives link the project stability to one program director; however, if that person happens to be transferred or move, the sustainability of the program could be jeopardized.
- The Oregon schools found that extrinsic reward systems had to continually be increased to maintain students’ motivation for following the character program. The schools that emphasized the intrinsic value of character saw the greatest increases in academic achievement and behavioral improvement.
- Greater parental involvement with the character education program can provide the most sustaining support.

### **Georgia**

The Georgia Department of Education implemented a character education program 1999–2002, and the Rome High School saw positive results, despite their student population increasing by 17%.

- From 1997–1999, one year prior and the first year of implementation, Rome High School saw a 27% decrease in acts of violence and / or aggressive behavior, and 22% decrease in out-of-school suspensions.
- From 1999–2000, they reported another 48% decrease in acts of violence and / or aggressive behavior, and a 17% decline in out-of-school suspensions.<sup>22</sup>

### **Maryland**

From 2004–2006, the Maryland Department of Education used three approaches to character education, *Second Step*, the *Lickona Model*, and *Character Counts*. Their results included:

- 68% of participating schools increased attendance rates.
- 48% of the participating schools reduced office referral rates and 43% improved suspension rates.
- 77% of participating schools increased honor roll rates.
- The number of adult volunteers increased in 75% of the participating schools.
- The number of mentor visits increased in 23% of the participating schools.<sup>23</sup>

These reports give a sample of how character education programs can benefit students, staff, parents, and communities.

## **How Much Funding Is Necessary?**

Reports indicate that character education does not need excessive funding. Staff training and periodical in-service trainings will be the primary expenses in a program.

Implementation costs vary with the program or curriculum chosen. Most of the examples mentioned above used federal grant money given to the state from the Partnerships in Character Education program. The U.S. Department of Education and Partnerships in Character Education State Pilot Projects 1995–2001 Report showed that federally funded programs lasted from 3–5 years. The reports also indicate that the benefits of a character education program might continue after the grant funding has expired if the teachers and staff continually emphasize character in the classroom.

Schools that discontinue character education programs can see the positive residual effects up to two years.

The reports consulted in this research suggested that once the administration, teachers, staff, parents, and the community all agree on the necessity of a character education program, sustainable funding is more likely to be found.

## Best Practices for Effective Character Education

### *Build Consensus*

Building community consensus appears to be one of the most critical components for creating a sustainable character education program. Character education reports from Maine,<sup>24</sup> Iowa,<sup>25</sup> Minnesota,<sup>26</sup> Kansas,<sup>27</sup> South Carolina,<sup>28</sup> Massachusetts,<sup>29</sup> Colorado,<sup>30</sup> Missouri,<sup>31</sup> Oregon,<sup>32</sup> and Maryland,<sup>33</sup> as well as leaders in the character education movement, emphasized the need for consensus as the foundation to a good program.

Consensus means more than deciding whether or not to implement a character education program into the school district or community. Consensus includes selecting the values to be taught and the methods of teaching them.



The results will vary from location to location, but the community—parents, teachers, administration, and students—should decide the values that most reflect their common core.<sup>34</sup> Communities can empower the teachers, staff, and administration by “giving permission” to expect and enforce good character and ethical behavior—instead of assuming that schools are values-free or neutral zones.<sup>35</sup> While educators and the committee cannot impose private values upon students, communities can recognize public values that impact everyone positively or negatively.<sup>36</sup>

Core values must be discussed, identified, and encouraged by adults who model character and expectations should be communicated to everyone in the community.<sup>37</sup> Creating consensus also means having a long-term commitment to fostering a character culture. Changing community and school cultures require a proactive time investment to achieve lasting outcomes.<sup>38</sup>

### *Create a Steering Committee*

Steering committees allow schools or communities to have a diverse group that can direct the program, provide resources, facilitate training, and generate community involvement instead of relying on one person to propel the initiative.

Iowa’s program evaluation noted that a community committee provided a framework for addressing behavioral problems that could arise with program leaders who do not comply with the standards of the task force.<sup>39</sup> While not a major concern, misbehavior of one member can adversely affect all members and the community.

However, simply organizing a representative committee of the community does not guarantee the character program’s success, but the committee can streamline efforts by asking:

- What are we attempting to teach and why?
- What are the most appropriate methods to teach core values?
- What will we use to measure the results of implementation?<sup>40</sup>

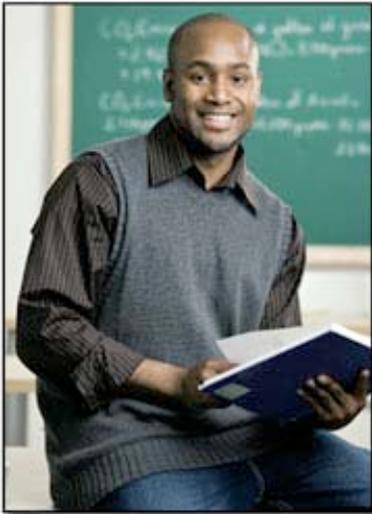
Meeting regularly also ensures that each action item receives the appropriate time and attention for effective implementation.<sup>41</sup>

The steering committee can also help define and measure the stated goals for implementing the program. Some schools see the need to help students develop interpersonal skills by teaching empathy, problem-solving skills, and emotional management,<sup>42</sup> and other schools see character education as a means to strengthen the academic program. A steering committee can evaluate the objectives, find weaknesses and strengths, and modify the program strategy.

### ***Measure Progress***

The most effective programs choose specific aspects to measure, such as absenteeism, tardiness, number of disruptions in class and on the bus, and test scores. The South Carolina Department of Education identified these indicators of progress: improved student attitudes and behavior; enhanced student performance and classroom productivity; enhanced teacher motivation; increased parental satisfaction; and enhanced school/community partnership.<sup>43</sup>

Other schools compared office referrals, incidents of violence, increased number of honor roll students, overall school environment before, during, and after implementation. Collecting and evaluating data takes time; however, the analysis gives insight into the greatest needs and where the greatest efforts should be directed.



### ***Train Leadership***

Carwyn Jones wrote, "...the good teacher and good teaching in general and moral education in particular has more to do with the character and virtues of the teacher and the creation of a nurturing environment rather than any particular skills that the teacher may possess."<sup>44</sup> Hannah Claybourne and Robin Galloway reported in Iowa's *Character Counts!* program that a key element to gaining consensus is to provide the entire staff (certified and non-certified) with training in character education. Training allows staff to voice any concerns they might have in program implementation, and it gives everyone the tools they need to integrate character lessons into other subjects.<sup>45</sup>

Staff training is critical to the effectiveness of implementation. Training all staff gives everyone the same information needed for modeling the community's standards. Most teachers agree that character education is needed in the classroom; however, most feel inadequately prepared to incorporate it into core curriculum and elective subjects.<sup>46</sup>

Joseph Garland Whiteley argues that the fatal flaw of character education is the lack of preparation devoted to training teachers how to incorporate character education into the daily classroom regimen. He reported that 90% of college and university teacher preparation programs agree that character education is important, but only 25% of

universities highly emphasize using character education programs in the university's teacher curriculum.<sup>47</sup>

### ***Encourage Student Input and Reflection***

Many character education evaluations suggest inviting student input and participation in creating the character education program. One report observed, "Students know their own behavior and that of their peers, and what drives it."<sup>48</sup> Listening to students' reflections can also help teachers know the age-appropriateness of character traits and how to better guide classroom discussions.

Studies reveal teacher-directed peer discussions and role-playing helps students develop skills that will help them beyond the classroom.<sup>49</sup> According to Kohlberg's theory on moral education, discussions should focus on understanding what moral principles require and make practical applications. Kohlberg argues that teachers should create cognitive dissonance in the classroom through debate, dilemmas, and questions that give students a more comprehensive understanding of principles and applications.<sup>50</sup>

The most effective character education programs recognize that children possess the ability to process moral situations, instead of using character education as a means to modify behavior. Children interpret their own actions and the situations in their world according to the moral terms they learn from family members, peers, and influential adults. When teachers and counselors invite student reflection, it assists students in articulating moral dilemmas and gives teachers an opportunity to guide the students' understanding of moral principles.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Promote Cognitive Skills and Practical Applications***

Moral development and problem-solving skills continually expand according to age-appropriateness of the subject matter, and Kohlberg and Hersh explain how moral development progresses through stages. Each stage cannot be skipped, for one stage builds upon another:

At the first level of moral development, children respond to rules in terms of the consequences, whether it will be a reward or a punishment.<sup>52</sup> Some character education programs rely heavily on external reinforcement, such as a rewards system to motivate students to adopt good behavior. While that might achieve some positive results, educators have discovered that rewards must constantly change to provide continual incentive. Evidence also suggests that the more teachers reward children for good behavior, the more likely they will develop interest in the reward itself and consider ethics in terms of the reward it could bring.<sup>53</sup>

The second level sees values in "marketplace" terms of fairness and reciprocity. Moral development moves from being a question of consequences to an exchange of favors.

Through the conventional stages three and four, individual moral standards develop in terms of conformity to social norms and maintaining social order. Behavior is judged according to intention and fulfilling responsibility.

The post-conventional fifth and sixth stages reveal efforts to define moral values based on social contracts and universal ethical principles. At this level, the principles become more abstract and ethical, like the Golden Rule, instead of being more concrete or directive, as in the Ten Commandments.<sup>54</sup>

Ultimately, character education should not be a prescribed set of responses used to control students. Rather cognitive moral development builds on the principles that guide a person's response to moral conflicts and ethical situations.<sup>55</sup> Stimulating individuals' to think enables them build reasoning patterns they will use to apply ethical principles to new situations.

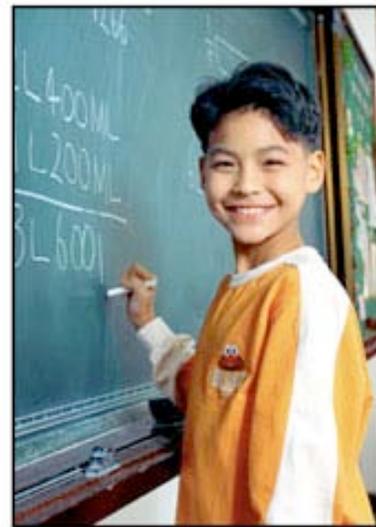
Character education can help teachers challenge students' thinking about solutions to moral conflicts, resolve inconsistencies, and reach solutions that reflect moral principles.<sup>56</sup> Kohlberg notes that if teachers want to foster morality and character in school, the teachers must work for an atmosphere that settles interpersonal issues based on principles, rather than power.<sup>57</sup>

Kohlberg also notes three ways cognitive development tends to fall short: 1) emphasizing the form, rather than content; 2) focusing on rights and duties more than the principles involved; and 3) emphasizing behavior instead of the moral judgment.<sup>58</sup>

### *Integrate versus Compartmentalize*

Character education initiatives cannot be seen as a cure-all for behavioral problems or academic deficiencies. The most effective programs train the teachers to take advantage of the "teachable moments" and emphasize character in the classroom. Methods must reach all learning styles and work cooperatively together.

While communities, steering committees, and the administration might agree on one specific list of character qualities to incorporate into the classroom, the "list" proves most effective when it provides the framework—rather than the single focus—of the character education initiative.<sup>59</sup> Alfie Kohn cautions that when character traits have been designated to specific days or months, the commitment to actually learning the trait and applying it diminishes.<sup>60</sup>



Integration most often takes the form of incorporating character education into social studies, citizenship studies, history, language arts, and literature.<sup>61</sup> Edgington identifies four approaches for using literature to open classroom discussions about character.

1. **Values inculcation** transmits values from a specific set of traits. Teachers often have the students read a book, and students identify specific traits through discussions or reflections.
2. **Values clarification** involves students articulating their personal values preferences. Teachers give students opportunities to state their preferences, reflect on them, and confirm or change their values according to society's core values.
3. **Values analysis** evaluates the rational and logical processes behind making values decisions. Stories give the catalyst for values analysis and the teacher guides the discussion by asking students to formulate alternatives, consequences, and reflections.
4. **Moral reasoning** requires that the teacher refrain from making judgments about the students' decisions or commenting on the values that shaped those decisions.

Emphasis lies in the reasoning process, not the decision itself. Teachers give students hypothetical or real situations and ask students to make a values decision, and articulate the reasoning behind it. Then teachers ask questions that change the circumstance to help students solidify their conclusions.<sup>62</sup>

Integrated character education often engages students at each level and enables teachers to incorporate all subjects. In Oregon, educators noted, "...it was our language arts and social studies teachers who could see clearly how to get lessons in character through their subjects. Now our science and math teachers have found ways to allow lessons in character to bubble up in their classrooms."<sup>63</sup> They also used existing programs as vehicles to incorporate character education, creating more integrated curricula.

Maryland's character education initiative incorporated three programs: *Second Step, Character Counts!*, and modified *Thomas Lickona's* philosophies.<sup>64</sup> Each program had a different character emphasis and was tailored to the specific needs of the school districts involved. Additionally, the teachers and student leaders were trained in each program to maximize results.

Oregon's Partnerships in Character Education used a similar approach, stating, "There is no single character education program that can provide all of the answers for a school or district...but all combined these programs with other programs and activities to create their own unique program."<sup>65</sup>

### ***Involve Everyone***

Counselors, student leaders, and character coaches can build upon the character education program and assist the teachers in creating a more integrated character education program.

Some schools choose to integrate character education in older students by selecting them as student leaders who interact and model good character for younger students. In so doing, it creates more awareness in the older students how their character impacts younger students and the school community. Oregon's character education program, HEART, involved the school counselor, librarian, and older students in mentoring younger students in technology, reading, discussions, art, and role-playing.<sup>66</sup>

Missouri's character education program hired coaches to work with teachers, parents, and students. However, their main objective was to collect data from the administration and parents, facilitate the program implementation, and record field notes.<sup>67</sup> They also developed the School Leadership Team (SLT) that included the principal, two classroom teachers, a counselor, and two parents or community leaders.<sup>68</sup> Coaches involved in SLT attended summer training in order to develop their strategic implementation plans for the next year.<sup>69</sup>

### ***Use Various Teaching Tools***

Educators realize how learning styles vary from student to student, and a good educator uses a variety of teaching styles to connect with his or her students.

Leading character education proponents, such as Thomas Lickona, William Bennett, E. A. Wynne, and Kevin Ryan, encourage educators to use literature and history as one of the main vehicles of transmitting values.<sup>70</sup> Literature allows students to reason out the decisions, and analyze the thought processes of those they read about and relate those experiences to their own lives.<sup>71</sup>

Literature appeals to a broad range of age groups and provides endless resources. Teachers can emphasize reading and language arts while drawing out observations and questions that will develop cognition and critical thinking skills.

Oregon found literature central to the character education program. One middle school principal observed:

*“We purchased classroom sets of a wonderful new book on bullying. In an effort to increase kindness, integrity, and self-responsibility, several teachers piloted the book with their classes. The results were outstanding. Students were able to evaluate and change their behaviors based on the vignettes they read and the ensuing discussion, all of which the teacher reported to be very powerful. One student came to me and said he finally got it, he now realized that his bullying behaviors were getting in the way of making and keeping friends. He was optimistic that he would be able to change.”<sup>72</sup>*



While moral dilemmas do not pervade the playing field to the same degree as in life, games and sports give myriad opportunities to teach values, character, and leadership skills to children. And some educators have noted that good ethics have sometimes been sacrificed in “the name of the game.”

Carwyn Jones observed that the ‘moral’ atmosphere in a classroom and on the field has a powerful influence over students, and teachers and coaches should be aware of the influence their attitudes and habits have on students.<sup>73</sup> Not only should teachers and coaches be mindful of their influence, but they should reflect how their classroom instruction translates to the field. Jones also said:

*“Sport is one stage on which our moral character is acted out. Our deep-rooted moral dispositions, virtues, and vices, are partly definitive of our character. We may be kind, caring, compassionate or cruel, vindictive, and selfish.... Moral education ought to be about teaching children to become good persons, to have well-rounded characters and to exhibit virtues like honesty and to avoid vices like selfishness.... We want children to have strong characters in order to make the right choice when temptation is put in their way, not to cheat, lie, foul, and deceive.”<sup>74</sup>*

## **Is Character Education a Form of Indoctrination?**

Character education strives to teach students basic values and principles of right and wrong; however, character education does not have the ability control students’ wills or their freedom to choose how they will behave. Students can choose to show respect, kindness, self-discipline, and concern for others; and they can choose acts of violence, theft, or dishonesty.

The goal of character education is to help students make good, independent decisions based on principles and values, not to mindlessly follow a list of directives. Almost all

character education programs across the United States agree that there is a relationship between character education and teaching students to become responsible citizens.<sup>75</sup>

## Conclusion

Character education is intrinsically intertwined in education, even if the emphasis varies from school to school. Educators and communities often recognize the value of character education, but feel a lack of confidence in knowing how to implement a formal program. However, when community and school leaders collaborate and make character education and staff training a priority, significant benefits can occur that can impact generations.

To speak with a Character First representative about tailoring a character education program for your school, call 877-357-0001 or visit [www.characterfirst.com](http://www.characterfirst.com).

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<sup>1</sup> Holt, John. "How Children Fail." 1955.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Education, Office of Sage and Frug-Free Schools, Character Education and Civic Engagement Technical Assistance Center, *Partnerships in Character Education, State Pilot Projects, 1995-2001: Lessons Learned*, Washington, D.C., 2008. [http://www.cetac.org/documents/Publications/DOE\\_StatePilot.pdf](http://www.cetac.org/documents/Publications/DOE_StatePilot.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> Battistich, Victor. *Character Education, Prevention, and Positive Youth Development*, University of Missouri, St. Louis. Character Education Partnership. Website. (CEP SUMMARY)

<sup>4</sup> Glanzer, Perry L. and Andrew J. Milson. "Legislating the Good: A Survey and Evaluation of Character Education Laws in the United States." *Educational Policy* 20, 525-550. 2006. 532.

<sup>5</sup> Kohn, Alfie. "How Not to Teach Values: A Critical Look at Character Education." *Phi Delta Kappan* 78.6 p. 428-439. February 1997.

<sup>6</sup> Whitley, Joseph Garland. *Reversing the Perceived Moral Decline in American Schools: A Critical Literature Review of America's Attempt at Character Education*. The College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA.

<sup>7</sup> Glanzer, *Ibid.*, 532.

<sup>8</sup> Battistich, Victor. *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Kohlberg, Lawrence and Richard H. Hersh. "Moral Development: A Review of the Theory." *Theory in Practice* 16.2 April 1977. 53

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