2006

Character education

Kim Slater
University of Northern Iowa

Character education

Abstract

Character education has been a topic that has been heavily talked about in many schools across the United States. This article presents the purpose and goals of character education in our school systems. Many issues and concerns are brought to educators' attentions when discussing the role character education plays. Issues and concerns such as teacher time and responsibility, proper way to teach Character Education, parents as partners, and religion and cultural differences are discussed in this article as well as the importance Character Education has on the lives of all students.

Running head: CHARACTER

Character Education

Kim Slater

Master of Arts in Elementary Education

UNIVERSITY OF NOTHERN IOWA

This review by: Kim Slater

Titled: Character Education

has been approved as meeting the research requirements for the Master of Arts in Education.

May 26, 2006
Date Approved

Lynn E. Nielsen
Graduate Faculty Reader

5/26/06
Date Approved

Judith M. Finkelstein
Graduate Faculty Reader

August 2, 2006
Date Approved

Greg P. Stefanich
Head, Department of Curriculum and Instruction

Table of Contents

Abstract

Character education has been a topic that has been heavily talked about in many schools across the United States. This article presents the purpose and goals of character education in our school systems. Many issues and concerns are brought to educators' attentions when discussing the role character education plays. Issues and concerns such as teacher time and responsibility, proper way to teach Character Education, parents as partners, and religion and cultural differences are discussed in this article as well as the importance Character Education has on the lives of all students.

Character Education

Character education is as old as education itself. In the earliest days, schools tackled character education head on. They did this through discipline, teacher's examples, and daily school curriculum. The Bible was a sourcebook for moral and religious instruction. In the 20th century, character education began to crumble. The idea of teaching morals began to become more of a private issue done within your own home. "Value judgment was not a subject for personal debate and transmission through the public schools" (Lickona, 1993).

The 1970's saw a return of values in education, but in new forms. They were values clarification and Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussions. In values clarification, educators don't impose values; educators help students choose their values freely. In his work, Kohlberg said, "develop student's powers of moral reasoning so they can judge which values are better than others" (Lickona, 1993).

The 1990's brought on a beginning of a new character education movement. Within this movement, schools are trying to incorporate character education into the curriculum. This can be traced to the Character Education Partnership (Exstrom, 2000) that was launched in March of 1993. This national coalition is committed to putting character development at the top of the nation's educational agenda.

Most advocates of this Character Education movement would agree with Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. when he stated: "The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically...Intelligence plus character-that is the goal of true education" (Exstrom, 2000). Advocates believe that there is a "core set of values that a person possesses, including honesty, morality, respect for self and others, self-

control, fairness, responsibility, obedience, generosity, patience, and kindness"(Exstrom, 2000). Proponents of character education would likely contribute the source of these traits to numerous beginnings. Some would argue these traits are innately good human characteristics present in all people. Others might argue that our nation was founded on these principles of virtue.

While these basic traits of perceived good character may seem harmless, not everyone is one hundred percent convinced that character education in one specific form is the right choice. In order to understand the issues surrounding character education programs, first we must realize that there is no fine scope or definition of a character education program. The terms used to describe the program and the goals they are created to fulfill are both left up in the air.

Methodology

Identifying and locating articles was the biggest stepping-stone in writing this paper. There are not a lot of reliable sources out there that deal with Character Education. I spent some time talking with my guidance counselor at school about Character Education and who important people were in relationship to the Character Education movement. Thomas Lickona was a name that was suggested and appeared in many of the articles I began to read. Therefore, I spent time locating several articles he had published to get his stance on Character Education. After reading his articles, I searched according to my outline I had made and found other views from well known Character Education authors Nel Noddings and Alfred Kohn. I feel as though I have gathered some great resources and information to help explain what Character Education is all about.

Character Education: Purposes and Goals

The most common definition of a character education program is "a dedicated effort to teach students traits believed to promote good character or virtues" (Milson, 2000). However, character education can take many different forms with regard to philosophy and implementation. "Character education involves teaching children about basic human values including honesty, kindness, generosity, courage, freedom, equality, and respect" (McBrien and Brandt, 1997). Character education is an effort made by schools, communities, and families to assist children in understanding these values.

Many other definitions of character education exist. The differences occur mainly when talking about beliefs in regard to appropriate emphasis of character education programs. Milson writes:

"Some educators wish to emphasize caring, compassion, and the community building potential of character education. Others see connections between character education and multicultural education. Still others have developed slightly different labels for character education. Lickona (1997) labeled his approach comprehensive character education and included drug and alcohol prevention and abstinence-based sex education" (Milson, 2000).

Most would agree that character education's effort is to encourage the moral growth of the students. As Milson (2000) points out, the lack of a true scope or definition of a character education program has been the problem. Milson also writes that character education may be viewed as "synonymous with moral education, values education, family planning, drug prevention, and any other effective objectives of the school" (2000).

The values that are being taught in character education programs have also been taught at home or in the church. Schools are being involved to recognize these morals, to respect them, and also to reinforce the same morals that families and churches are teaching. Children spend most of their days within a school environment. This means that they are without the parental guidance that would normally be the number one teacher of their morals. Character education provides daily reminders of what actions, reactions, and beliefs are needed in order to become a person of high moral standards.

The first impetus, Lickona (1993) believes is that the majority of the youth in today's society may not be receiving an appropriate amount of good character education lessons in their homes and communities. Therefore there is a push for character education programs in the schools to help spark the initiative to improve the moral climate of today's youth. Lickona (1993) says that there are at least 3 causes for this: the decline of family; troubling trends in youth character; and recovery of shared, objectively important ethical values. Schools have to teach values that students aren't learning at home. In order for schools to conduct teaching and learning, they must become caring moral communities. This community needs to help children from all types of homes and backgrounds focus on their work, control their anger, feel cared about, and become responsible students. Lickona also quoted "Dan Quayle Was Right, " (April, 1993) when he stated:

> If current trends continue, less than half of children born today will live continuously with their own mother and father throughout childhood...An increasing number of children will experience family break-up two or even three times during their childhood.

The second impetus for more character education is the sense that poor parenting, the wrong kind of adult role models, and pressure from their peer groups in general have affected young people. Lickona (1993) says the evidence that this environment is taking a toll on youth character can be found in the following trends: rising youth violence; increasing dishonesty (lying, cheating, and stealing); growing disrespect for authority; peer cruelty; a resurgence of bigotry on school campuses from preschool through higher education; a decline in the work ethic; sexual precocity; a growing self-centeredness and declining civic responsibility; an increase in self-destructive behavior; and ethical illiteracy. Finally, the third reason why there is growing interest in character education is that the moral decline in society has gotten bad enough to jolt us out of privatism. Adults are realizing that it is necessary to promote morality by teaching the young both directly and indirectly.

Character education is being pushed at both the state and national levels. The Clinton Administration supported character education by providing large monetary grants to partnerships between state and local government agencies for setting up character education programs. In the past five years, thirty-six states have received funding from this source (Exstrom, 2000). "As of August 2000, at least twenty-four states and the District of Columbia had enacted legislation that requires schools to address character education and values" (Exstrom, 2000). Another 24 states considered such legislation during the 2000 session.

Eleven Principles of Character Education

There are eleven principles which outline key components of effective Character Education and let schools and districts evaluate and reflect on their current practices in relation to specific criteria.

> "There is no single script for effective character education, but there are some important basic principles. The following eleven principles serve as criteria that schools and other groups can use to plan a character education effort and to evaluate available character education programs, books, and curriculum resources" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003).

The first principle is "Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). In Character Education, the following values are shared to promote good character: caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility, and respect for self and others. In a school committed to character education, these values are treated as an obligation. Schools make clear that these basic values transcend religious and cultural differences and express our common humanity.

The second principle is "Character must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling, and behavior" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). If the character program is going to be effective, character needs to be broadly conceived by encompassing cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of life. "The task of character education therefore is to help students and all other members of a learning community know 'the good,' value it, and act upon it" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). As people mature with character, they will understand their core values and redefine them as they grow.

Third, "Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive, and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). Schools that are committed to character education look at themselves and see how everything that goes on in school affects the values and character of education. Within a proactive and comprehensive approach, schools develop ways to develop character and use all aspects of schooling as opportunities for character development.

Fourth, "The school must be a caring community" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). The school itself must embody good character. It is important for the school to become a moral community that helps students form caring attachments to adults. All children have a need to belong and are more likely to internalize the values and expectations of groups if this goal is met. All aspects of the school day must be filled with core values such as concern and respect for others; responsibility, kindness, and fairness in order to create the caring community desired.

Fifth, "To develop character, students need opportunities for moral action" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). Students are constructive learners, they learn best by doing. To develop good character, they need many and varied opportunities to apply values in everyday situations. By practicing in real-life challenges such as how to reach consensus in a class meeting, how to reduce fights on a playground, or how to carry out a service learning project, students develop practical understanding of the requirements of fairness, cooperation, and respect.

Sixth, "Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed" (Lickona, Schaps,

and Lewis, 2003). Character education and academic learning must not be conceived as separate spheres. Instead, they need to be a strong and mutually supportive part of a child's education. In a caring classroom and school where students feel respected by their teachers and peers, they are more likely to work hard and achieve. Because students come to school with diverse skills, interests, and needs, it is important to have a curriculum that is interesting and meaningful for all students. A character education school makes effective use of active teaching and learning methods such as cooperative learning, problem solving approaches and experience-based projects. "One of the most authentic ways to respect children is to respect the way they learn" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003).

Seventh, "Character education should strive to develop students' intrinsic motivation" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). As students develop good character, they enhance a stronger inner commitment to doing what their moral judgment tells them is right. Schools, when dealing with discipline, should strive to develop this intrinsic commitment to core values. Schools should minimize the extrinsic rewards and punishments that distract students' attention from the real reasons to behave responsibly. Responses to rule breaking should give students opportunities for restitution and foster the students' understanding of the rules and willingness to abide by them in the future.

Eighth, "The school staff must become a learning and moral community in which all share responsibility for character education and attempt to adhere to the same core values and guide the education of students" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). All staff members including teachers, administrators, counselors, coaches, secretaries, cafeteria workers, aides, bus drivers, etc. must be involved in learning about, discussing,

and taking ownership of the character education effort within their school. It is important that all adults model the core values in their own behaviors and take advantage of all opportunities that arise to influence the character of the students that they come into contact with. It is also equally important that the same values and norms that govern the life of students must also govern the life of the adults. If students are going to be treated as constructive learners, the staff should also be treated in the same way. Having opportunities to observe and try ways to integrate character education into their work is very important. If adult members of a school do not experience mutual respect, fairness, and cooperation in their adult relationships, they are less likely to be committed to teaching those values to students. Finally, schools must find time for staff reflection on moral matters. In small groups, staff members should be asking a variety of questions such as: What positive character building activities are taking place? What negative experiences is the school currently failing to address? What school practices are at odds with its professed core values and desire to develop a caring school community? "Reflection of this nature is an indispensable condition for developing the moral life of a school" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003).

Ninth, "Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). For character education to meet its criteria there must be a leader that is in charge of the efforts and a committee that keeps everyone focused. These two parties need to be responsible for long term planning. Over time, this group can be overtaken by everyone involved with the program, but for the beginning stages there needs to be a strong force leading the implementation process.

Students should also be brought into the leadership roles. This is a good opportunity to get all aspects of the school involved in the program decision-making.

Tenth, "The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). Within the school's character education mission statement it should be stated that parents are first and most important moral educators of their children. Next, it is important to communicate with parents at every stage including the school's goals and activities regarding character development. To build the trust between home and school, parents should be represented on the character leadership committee that does the planning. Finally, schools and families will enhance the effectiveness of their partnership if they recruit the help of the whole community.

Finally, number eleven states, "Evaluation of character education should assess the character of the school, the school staff's functioning as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character" (Lickona, Schaps, and Lewis, 2003). Asking questions such as, "to what extent is the school becoming a more caring community?" can assess the character of the school. This can be done through a survey given to the students within the school. The school's staff should be looked at in terms of the extent the staff has developed an understanding of what they can do to foster character development, skills to carry it out, personal commitments to carry it out, and consistent habits of acting upon their developing capacities as character educators. To assess the student's character, it is important to find out to what extent they manifest the understanding of, commitment to, and action upon the core ethical values. Schools can also assess the three domains of character (knowing, feeling, and behaving) through

questionnaires that measure student moral judgment, moral commitment, and self-reported moral behavior. Such questionnaires can be administered at the beginning of the school's initiative to get a baseline and again at later points to assess the progress.

Issues and Concerns

Though the goals and intent of character education are favorable to many, the approach taken by schools can cause controversy. "Not everyone is jumping on the bandwagon in support of character education" (Exstrom, 2000). Many of those who are concerned with the implementation of character education programs argue that teachers already have too many responsibilities. The approaches some schools are taking to instill these values are raising issues(Kohn, 1998). Still others worry over mixing school with religion. As educators, we must be aware of these issues and the arguments surrounding them.

The first issue or concern is *Teacher time and responsibility*. The teachers of today's classrooms have many responsibilities besides teaching traditional subjects. "With the added pressure of assessments and accountability, some educators feel overwhelmed with the additional task of instilling values" (Exstrom, 2000). How will yet another set of standards fit into a school year? How will this affect planning, lessons, and management of classrooms? We are living in an era of standardized testing, when teaching to the test seemingly looms over the heads of teachers every day. Looking further down the road, will standardized testing require students to answer questions of a character-valued nature, with regard to morals and virtues that are being taught in the schools? Furthermore, teachers do not feel they are well equipped to teach morals and values in the classroom. Experienced teachers may take the attitude that they need training in order to prepare for this type of program. Beginning teachers are not

supplemented with available courses at the university level that would cover the teaching of character education in the classroom (Milson, 2000). These weaknesses in skills may make the programs less acceptable to teachers and provide for low teacher motivation.

The second issue or concern is *the proper way to teach character.* "The techniques of character education may succeed in temporarily buying a particular behavior. But they are unlikely to leave children with a commitment to that behavior, a reason to continue acting that way in the future" (Kohn, 1998, p.31). Kohn was writing in reference to his arguments that many character education programs have, especially those "rewarding" students for good behavior. The evidence suggests that the more we reward people for doing something, the more likely they are to lose interest in whatever they had to do to get the reward. You would win the battle at hand, but ultimately lose the war. "In short, it makes no sense to dangle goodies in front of children for being virtuous. But even worse than rewards are awards-certificates, plaques, and other tokens of recognition whose numbers have been artificially limited so only a few can get them (Kohn, 1998, p. 32). When you single out winners in your classroom, you send a strong message that other people are an obstacle when trying to become successful. Therefore causing them to want to beat out their peers and not build a caring friendship with them for the sense of community.

Many theorists who support and develop character education programs support the idea that people learn best from repetition and memorization-and they regard teaching as "a matter of telling and compelling" (Kohn, 1998, p.27). Many programs, such as Character Counts! advocate-drilling students on character related concepts until they can produce the right answers. This same program also "asserts that young people should be

specifically and repeatedly told what is expected of them" (Kohn, 1998, p.27). Most character proponents favor a model of instruction in which good character and values are instilled in or transmitted to students. In this model, the character traits or values are already fully formed, ready to be passed on to students who are seen as empty vessels to be filled or computers to be programmed with this new knowledge (Kohn, 1998).

Kohn finds it incredulous that professional educators-most of whom realize that the transmission model of educating students fails to facilitate intellectual development-will accept the same type of model for use in the teachings of ethics and good character. As educators, we must compare what we are teaching and how we are teaching it with the research on how students best learn. We should ask ourselves if there is room for a type of teaching in the classroom that is based on constructivist principles. Why should the way students best learn math and social studies differ from how they would best learn good character traits? We should not be interested in demanding good behavior from our students; rather, we should focus on supporting and facilitating a child's moral and social growth. By doing so, we will be inviting students to integrate lessons on good character into his or her values structure (Kohn, 1998). Actually, teachers have been transmitting values to children for as long as there have been schools in our country. The method used is literature. Proponents of character education (e.g., Bennett 1995; Likcona 1991; Wynne and Ryan 1997) have advocated literature as an essential vehicle for the transmission of core values. The primary reason given for using literature in character education is the relevance to the lives of the children that literature can afford. Because many researchers emphasize that values are present in literature and in a variety of genres, finding literature to help in values instruction in not difficult. The challenging

aspect is determining how to incorporate the literature into our lesson or unit. Once this is figured out however, teachers find that it is a natural and comfortable correlation.

In the last thirty years, four approaches to teaching values have been used in schools: values inculcation, values clarification, values analysis, and moral reasoning (Edgington, 2002). Each has a specific purpose behind its implementation and has supporters and detractors when it is being considered for use in character education. Values inculcation is the most traditional approach used in character education. This is the act of transmitting to students a predetermined set of values. One way this can be accomplished is by having students read a book with characters possessing worthy values or character traits that can be noted by the students alone or with the teacher's help. These values can be stressed either through reflection or through classroom discussion. Secondly, a values clarification approach to character education involves having students come to terms with their individual values preferences. With this, they are given opportunities to cite their preferences, reflect on them, and then confirm or change their value choices. This is strictly the student articulating his/her preference. The teacher makes no effort to determine whether their preference is correct. Third, the use of a rational and logical approach to a values decision is the premise behind values analysis. Students examine the alternatives and the potential consequences that may stem from them. When faced with making a values decision, the students use reasoning and decision- making skills to not only make the decision, but also to justify it. Once a values decision has been made, the teacher may help the students examine the decision and the important issues leading to the decision as it relates to society's expectations and demands. Finally, moral reasoning is introduced whereby the students are stimulated to

move to the next, more complex stage of moral development. During this approach, the teacher provides students with real or hypothetical situations and asks them to make a values decision and explain their reasoning for making that choice. When using literature to teach moral reasoning, teachers need to give students the opportunity to explore the perspectives of the people in the story and to explain the reasons for their actions and responses to new situations.

Because character education is so important in our schools today, teachers are expected to make societal character traits a part of their curriculum. When literature is coupled with practical modes of values instruction, it provides a more powerful mode of character education than a simplistic "trait-of-the-week" strategy. "According to Aristotle, morality and character education are not random acts but habits, which have been described as habits of the mind, habits of the heart, and habits of action. If the goal of character education is to help students know the good, desire the good, and ultimately do the good, we must find ways to achieve that end that are authentic, meaningful, and relevant of our students. One way is to use literature to cultivate character education" (Edgington, 2002).

A third issue or concern is *Parents as partners.* Although schools have a central role in developing students' character, the most profound impact on a students' development come from their families, notably their parents. According to Henderson and Berla (1994), the single best predictor of student success in school is the level of parental involvement in a child's education. The benefits of parental involvement include improved academic achievement, reduced absenteeism, improved school behavior, greater academic motivation, and lower dropout rates (Colker, n.d.; Hendersen

& Mapp, 2002, Jordan, Orozco, & Averett, 2001). "For society to endure, it must socialize each generation of youth to embody the virtues and characteristics that are essential to that society's survival and prosperity. Schools, as social institution, have long understood their sacred trust to help form each future generation of citizens" (Berkowitz, 2005).

Berkowitz and Bier identify three main ways that a school can involve parents in its character development agenda: The school can consider the parents as information recipients, as partners, and as clients. Parents must partner with schools because a child's parents also act as his or her teachers. There are indeed many parallels between parenting and teaching. Both character education and good parenting call for adults who behave in ways that promote the positive development of youth. One of the most common refrains heard from educators is that they want more parental involvement in schools. Hoover-Dempsey and Sandler (1997) developed a model of what motivates or discourages parent involvement. First, schools need to help parents understand that it is part of their parental role to be involved in their children's education. Second, some parents may not participate because they feel incompetent. Schools can deal with this by providing nonacademic avenues for parent involvement. For example, ask parents to help on field trips or make cultural presentations. Third, parents may hold back from getting involved because they don't feel welcomed by the school. Some schools create a parent resource center. Forming and maintaining this center may become a project of the school's parent-teacher organization, thereby empowering parents as partners. A fourth barrier to parent involvement, especially in secondary schools, may be the students' outward resistance to parental involvement. Older students often appear to be les welcoming of

their parents in school. However, a 1999 Public Agenda survey found that teens understood and even appreciated their parents for being involved and for pushing them to do schoolwork.

Healthy character education means empowering all stakeholder groups. Role modeling from parents is essential in well-functioning character education. To promote respect in students, adults must treat young people respectfully, and to foster responsibility, they must give students genuine voice and responsibility. Parental involvement in schools is a win-win-win proposition for students, parents, and schools. Parents must partner with schools because a child's parents also act as his or her teachers.

And finally the last issue or concern is *Religion and cultural differences*. If character education is required, how do we, as educators, handle the teaching of appointed values in multiculturaly diverse classrooms? Schools are reflective of the population-we are a country of numerous races, ethnicities, cultures, and religions. Many of the values taught in character education may be viewed quite differently according to one's religion or cultural background.

Common themes among character education programs are trustworthiness, honesty, responsibility, and caring (Milson, 2000; Lickona, 2000). Most character education programs are said to be developed in order to promote the moral and virtuous growth of students (Milson, 2000). While this may seem harmless, examination of these character traits and how diverse populations may perceive them could cause a rift in the future of character education programs.

"In the shadows of their [character education proponents] writings, there lurks the assumption that only religion can serve as the foundation for good character" (Kohn,

1998, p.33). Many proponents of character education admit they do not believe the difference between right and wrong can be taught without reference to religion (Kohn, 1998). When examined closely, the design of many character education programs is overwhelmingly conservative in nature and therefore, controversial.

For example, the famous Protestant (Christian) work ethic is prominent-all children should learn to work hard. Kohn argues that the value in this type of teaching would focus on the hard work and not the outcome (1998, p24). Furthermore, many character education programs promote values such as obedience and diligence. Not only is the morality of these traits questionable, but also many people would feel there are traits equally important that do not make the lists of character education programs. Also, many of these traits may seem to violate separation of church and state.

Although many opponents do worry that character education programs violate separation of church and state, a strong movement has begun to integrate religious based teachings into character education programs (Lickona, 2000). In his article, "Character Education: The Heart of School Reform," Thomas Lickona reported that "the moral and spiritual trials of our times have given rise to a national character education movement" (p.58). The argument for integration of religion into character education programs has grown in its number of proponents (Lickona, 1999, 2000). In the midst of this uprising, Lickona proposes that there are ways to integrate religion into public schools in such a way that good character virtues might be taught and that the First Amendment may be honored (Lickona, 1999, 2000).

However, Lickona goes on to explain how religion is the answer to providing these virtues through a comprehensive approach to character education. By a

comprehensive approach, Lickona explains the virtues would be fostered through the "teacher's example, the subject matter of the curriculum, the rigor of academic standard, the conduct of sports and extra curricular activities, the handling of rules and discipline, and the school's intellectual climate" (1999). Through a comprehensive approach, no school activity or contact would be without a moral-virtue foundation and these virtues would be expressed at all times. Proponents of integrating religious teachings into a comprehensive character education program identify several virtues they feel compelled to support. These include virtues of abstinence-based sex education, the study of social justice regarding Biblical teachings, issues of tolerance regarding topics such as homosexuality, and grounding character education in a view that "gives life a religious meaning and direction" (Lickona, 2000).

Lickona's comprehensive approach would be suitable to private, religious-based schools that seek to serve a Protestant population. He does not examine a situation where the teacher might not be of the same Protestant beliefs he or she would be expected to display, model, or teach. However, in public school settings, many teachers do not claim to be Protestant or to have any religious affiliations. Another question to examine in regard to this comprehensive approach would be the reaction of parents, administrators, school board members, the community, and local governments to this deliberate integration of primarily Christian-based teachings in our ethnically diverse school populations.

Caring versus Character Education

Nel Noddings is one of the premier philosophers of moral education today. She is outside the mainstream theory, research, and practice traditions of character education.

Her body of work is unrivalled for originality of insight, comprehensiveness, and coherence. Noddings (1984) states, "As we build an ethic on caring and as we examine education under its guidance, we shall see that the greatest obligation of educators, inside and outside formal schooling, is to nurture the ethical ideals of those whom they come in contact." The need to be cared for is a human universal. We are born dependent on the caring of others. "If our life is to be preserved, if we are to grow, if we are to arrive at some level of acceptability in our culture and community, we must be cared for constantly from the moment of our squalling debut in the world (Noddings, 1992, p.45)." To be cared for is one important and very essential element in the moral of life. Caring is not just a one-way street. Because the self is a relation, all acts of caring are characterized by both give and take. A crucial point Noddings makes is "one learns not only how to care by being cared for, one learns that one must care if the self that has been confirmed by receiving care is to be sustained" (Noddings, 2004). Because of this, learning to be cared for is the first step in moral education.

Education can contribute to the moral life of students. Noddings describes four great means of nurturing the ethical ideal: modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation. First off, modeling is important to education because as educators we have to show in our own behavior what it means to care. Not only do educators need to tell their students they care, they need to give them texts to read on the subject, and demonstrate caring relationships with them. Secondly, dialogue allows educators to receive an understanding for empathy and/or appreciation trough conversation that guides our caring responses. Dialogue is the way to model the caring ideal in communication. The third means is practice. In dialogue, the teacher models caring communication while

the student practices it. But the practices of caring should extend beyond one's own classroom. Noddings believes all students should be involved in caring apprenticeships with the school custodian, groundskeeper, kitchen staff, or for younger children. These service opportunities should also go out of the school and into the community. For example: nursing homes, hospitals, animal shelters, and parks. Community service involves and contributes to the moral life of students. "Children need to participate in caring with adult models who show them how to care, talk with them about the difficulties and rewards of such work, and demonstrate in their own work that caring is important" (Noddings, 1995, p.191). The final means is confirmation. When we confirm someone or something, we identify a better self and encourage its development. The ultimate goal is to see a student growing in care for others and his or her own ethical ideals.

Care education and character education have a lot in common. Firstly and most generally, both character and care education proponents agree that moral education should be directed at producing better people and not just better principles or reasoning. Secondly, both care and character educators do value moral reasoning, but neither group believes moral principles themselves provide sufficient motivation for moral education. Thirdly, care theorists respect the virtues, although they differ with character theorists on how they are best taught. Finally, Noddings observes that unlike moral philosophers, character educators and care theorists are concerned with the broader question, "How shall we live?"

On the other hand, the main difference is that care education is relation-centered rather than agent-centered and is more concerned with the caring relation than with

caring as a virtue. Care educators are wary of trying to instill virtues directly. They are more concerned with establishing conditions through modeling, dialogue, practice, and confirmation that will bring out the best in students. Secondly, the curriculum of moral education for care educators is not defined by a list of free-floating virtues as it is with character education. Thirdly, care educators put a huge emphasis on the social virtues such as good manners or emotional sensitivity. Finally, both types of educators make extensive use of stories, but teachers of care utilize more narratives to create ethical decisions. Character educators would be more likely to use stories that portray inspirational heroes hoping to instill those same virtues into their students. Noddings says that the basic problem with character education as direct instilment is that it takes the virtues out of context. It takes away the virtues from the relationships and concerns of the students. Another feature of character education, according to Noddings, is its dependence on a strong community with a consensus on core values. This causes a problem in communities that don't have a consensus. It is very difficult to decide which virtues should be taught. We have been reminded that moral education is fundamentally directed to self-knowledge, understood especially as care for self's ethical ideals. The obligation of the moral educator is to pay attention to his or her own sense of 'I must care' by nurturing the 'I must care' of the student. This is the vision that makes Noddings a philosopher of moral education that people pay attention to.

Conclusions and Recommendations

As we look at character education programs and the goals we have for our students, it is important to keep in mind that not everyone will share an optimistic outlook on these programs. However, the goals of character education are promising and the

outlook for these types of programs is favorable. As more and more state and federal money is poured into these programs, they are becoming a larger fixture in the classroom and thus, we may see more controversy surrounding the issues of character education. As educators, we should become aware of the issues, and realize that there is no gray area. Consequently, we should demand more training and opportunities to enhance our knowledge base and skills for delivering the messages of these topics to our students.

We should always remember that our students are individuals. They enter our classrooms with a set of values and standards that are already in place. Parents, home, or church generally teach these values and standards. We should not repress these personal or religious beliefs and demand that they be fused with the character values that we teach. We should teach our material with the hope that our students are growing and integrating our teachings into their own set of values and standards. Then, we will have accomplished our goal-our students will integrate our teachings and use them in their lives as they grow into adulthood.

References

Bergman, R. (2004). "Caring for the ethical ideal: Nel Noddings on moral education." *Journal of Moral Education, 33(2).*

Berkowitx, M. & Bier, M.C. (2005). "Character education parents as partners." *Professional Development Collection, 63(1).*

Edgington, W.D. (2002). "To promote character education, use literature for children and adolescents." *Social Studies, 93,* 113. Retrieved January 7, 2006 from http://web34.epnet.com.

Exstrom, M. (2000). "Reading, "Rithmetic...and responsibility." *State Legislature, 26* (9), 30-37.

Hoover-Dempsey, K.V., & Sandler, H.M. (1997). "Why do parents become involved in their children's education?" *Review of Educational Research, 67, 3-42.*

Kohn, A. (1998). "How not to teach values: A critical look at character education." *What to Look for in a Classroom.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers. P. 16-43.

Lickona, T. (2000). "Religion and character education." *Phi Delta Kappa, 81 (1),* 21.

Lickona, T. (1999). "Character education: The heart of school reform." *Religion and Education, 27 (1).*

Lickona, T. (1993). "The return of character education." *Educational Leadership, 51 (3).* Retrieved July 16, 2003 from www.ascd.org/readingroom/edlead/9311/lickona.html

Lickona, T., Schapps, E., & Lewis, C. "Eleven principles of effective character education." Retrieved July 10, 2003 from www.character.org.

McBrien, J.L. & Brandt, R. S. (1997). *The Language of Learning: A Guide to Education Terms, 17-18.* Retrieved August 15, 2003 from www.ascd.org/portal/site/ascd/menuitem.4d64d1d40a85dbbddeb3ffdb62108a0c

Milson, A. (2000). "Social studies teacher educators' perceptions of character education." *Theory and Research in Social Education, 28 (2), 144-169.*

Noddings, N. (1984). Caring: a feminine approach to ethics and moral education, Berkeley, CA, University of California Press.

Noddings, N. (1992). The challenge to care in schools: an alternative approach to education, New York, Teachers College Press.

Public Agenda. (1999). "A little push: What teens want from their parents." *Public Agenda Online.* Retrieved February 18, 2006 from www.publicagenda.org/specials/parent/parent8htm.