

# Incorporating Core Values into Character Education in the Current Scenario: Evidence from Literature

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## ABSTRACT

The aim of this paper is to critically explore how the concept of character education has been identified in the world and to search how the contents and strategies based on character education are being used in various countries in the world. Although educational reforms and various educational reports had highlighted this necessity, character education issues have increased nationally as well as globally. The use of new trends is at a minimum. Therefore, among innovative approaches it is important to identify and determine how to apply character education approaches. It becomes very important to inculcate core values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others, to children and pedagogy employed by parents and teachers to teach character education to children and youth. The paper describes how the current educational system can make relevant the specific characteristics of the concept of character education.

**Keywords:** Character, Character education, Core values, School, Moral discipline

## INTRODUCTION

This paper is a critical review of character education as an emerging approach in integrating core values and is based on relevant books, research papers, e-journals, education reports and websites. Moral education belonged as a component of philosophy coming down from ancient times. The history of moral and character education is thought to be as old as human history and education. Moral education seems to have existed during the time of philosophers such as Aristotle, Plato and Confucius [1].

Ethics was also identified as a term similar to moral education. The English word morality comes down from the Latin word *moralis* with the simple meaning of good behavior. This is a philosophical concept going beyond a behavioral concept. The reason for this was to judge between what is good and bad as an intellectual rationale. Behaviorally the word moral expresses discipline. This discipline can be analyzed with two meanings. The first is self-discipline and the second is correct actions. Self-discipline is something that the child develops for a long time along with growth.

Under moral education there are different approaches in different countries. Among these, Sri Lanka and India focus on value education while Britain focuses on citizenship education. Japan pays attention to civic education while in Russia it is communist morality. In the United States of America, it is character education. The objectives of this paper are to critically review the principles and pedagogy relating to the concept of character education; to discuss the ways and strategies in teaching values in character education; and to identify the teacher's role in character education.

## DEFINITIONS OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

The term 'character' as an English word is derived from the Greek word "Charakter" that literally means a mark impressed on a "coin" or meter. It refers to an indelible mark of consistency and predictability. It is an enduring dispositional tendency in behavior which is deeply rooted in one's personality that integrates

behavior, attitude and values (as cited by [2], from Hay, Castle, Stimson & Davies (1995). “A person’s “character” refers to the disposition and habits that determine the way that a person normally responds to desires, fears, challenges, opportunities, failures and successes” [13, p.24]. This author describes the character of a person in reference to moral judgments about the worthiness of a person and, therefore, to have a strong, great, or honorable character is to be a person of merit, worthy of admiration and honor. Philips (2008) as quoted by [4], states character is a set of values leading to a system, which is the base of thinking, attitude, and actions which are performed.

Character education is a long-term solution addressing moral, ethical and academic issues that are of growing concern in current society. Reference [9] described the nature of character education as an effort to cultivate virtue. The school stands for virtues such as respect and responsibility and promotes these explicitly and always. Behavior is considered to be the ultimate measure of character although thinking and discussing are important.

Reference [9] says that character education has three goals, namely, good people, good schools and a good society. The first goal, that is, good people stresses we need good character to be fully human. The two hallmarks of human maturity are love and work and to be capable of these, we need strength of mind, heart and will. The second goal which is good schools, affirms that we need character education if we are to have good schools. Schools are much more helpful to teaching and learning when they are civil, caring, and focused communities. Third goal which is a good society affirms character education as being essential to the task of building a moral society. Reference [9] lists a number of societal problems such as violence, dishonesty, greed, family disintegration, growing numbers of children living in poverty and disrespect for life born and preborn as having deep roots and requiring systematic solutions. But the author reiterates that it is not possible to build a virtuous society if virtue does not exist in the mind, heart, souls of individual human beings.

According to [10] character education is the deliberate effort to teach virtues that are objectively good human qualities, good for the individual and good for the whole human community. “Values” may change, but virtues do not. Justice, honesty and patience are always considered as virtues and will always remain so. Virtues represent objective moral standards that go beyond time, culture and choice of individuals. Reference [10] describes that every virtue has three parts, namely, moral knowledge, moral feeling, and moral behavior. The author takes the virtue of justice as an example to describe these three parts. Firstly, one must understand what justice is and what justice requires of a person in human relations, and this is moral knowledge. In moral feeling one must feel guilty when one behaves unjustly and have moral indignation when seeing others suffer unjustly. Finally in moral behavior one must practice justice, which means acting fairly in one’s personal relations and fulfilling obligations as a citizen to promote social justice. Teacher needs to develop virtuous character in their students, by helping young people to know what virtues are, appreciating their importance and wanting to possess them and practice them in their day-to-day conduct.

Reference [11] describes character education as a national movement that creates schools that foster ethical, responsible and caring young people. This is done by modelling and teaching good character through emphasizing shared universal values. Schools, districts and states intentionally make an effort to instill in their students important core ethical values such as caring, honesty, fairness, responsibility and respect for self and others.

*Character education is an umbrella term used to describe many aspects of teaching and learning for personal development. Some areas under this umbrella are moral reason/cognitive development, social and emotional learning, moral education/virtue life skills education, caring community, health education, violence prevention conflict resolution/peer mediation and ethical/moral philosophy (Larson, 2009 cited in [2, p.122].*

Character education means a systematic, comprehensive and planned approach to teach moral values. Likewise moral development is defined as the process through which children acquire the concepts of right and wrong as well as the ability to regulate behaviour to adhere to standards deemed appropriate by society (Kochanska, 1994 cited by [3]).

## PRINCIPLES OF EFFECTIVE CHARACTER EDUCATION

Reference [11] expressed that there is no single script for effective character education, but that there are some important basic principles. They proposed eleven principles to serve as criteria that schools and other groups could use to plan efforts at character education and to evaluate available character education programs, books and curriculum resources. The eleven principles proposed by the authors are as follows:

1. Character education promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character.
2. “Character” must be comprehensively defined to include thinking, feeling and behavior.
3. Effective character education requires an intentional, proactive and comprehensive approach that promotes the core values in all phases of school life.
4. The school must be a caring community.
5. To develop character, students need opportunities for moral action.
6. Effective character education includes a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners and helps them succeed.
7. Character education should strive to develop students’ intrinsic motivation.
8. 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 that guide the education of students.
9. Character education requires moral leadership from both staff and students.
10. The school must recruit parents and community members as full partners in the character-building effort.
11. 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.

## WAYS OF TEACHING VALUES

A variety of ways can be used for teaching values in the classroom, some of them are formal while some are informal. Six different formal approaches are discussed here. Each approach uses different teaching and learning methods, specific roles which the student and the teacher must adopt and uses particular characteristics teaching and learning materials.

The six approaches are: inculcation, moral development, analysis, clarification, action learning, and emotional – rational approach.

### • Inculcation Approach

According to Krathwohl (1964) cited by [7] the central purpose of inculcation is to socialize students so that certain social, political, moral, or cultural values interiorized becoming a part of them. For inculcating values, [5] and [16] identified a variety of teaching methods that can be used such as explanation, manipulation, positive and negative reinforcement, and modeling. These methods can be used separately or in combination with one another to inculcate specific values or to modify a behavior. The most common method used for inculcation is explanation which consist of teachers simply telling students what to believe and how to behave. The teacher may also manipulate the environment or the experiences to which the students are exposed. Techniques such as role playing, or games and simulation are used.

A method often used for inculcation is positive and negative reinforcement. Positive reinforcement could be a teacher praising a student for behaving in accordance with a particular value. Negative reinforcement

could consist of the teacher punishing a student for behaving contrary to a certain desirable value. Modeling is another effective method of inculcating values in students. Examples of modeling behavior may be drawn from history, literature, legends, or more directly from examples set by teachers and students. The teacher often becomes a model simply by exemplifying values like punctuality, enthusiasm for learning, or caring for others. Students can be a negative model as well, such as when a teacher asks a poorer student to read his or her essay to the class. Such work is being singled out as an example not to be followed by other students. The criticism and embarrassment the student faces pushes other students to produce better essays and may inculcate the values of learning and hard work.

- **The Moral Development Approach**

The rationale of the moral development approach is mainly to inspire students to advance their powers of moral reasoning through a series of stages that gradually get advanced and complex. The foundation for the moral development approach was laid by [14] and refined and extended by Kohlberg. The most characteristic method that has been used for stimulating moral development has been the use of moral dilemmas which are situations in which values become conflicting, where claims can be made for several choices, and where each choice is made at the expense of another. Students are asked to think about how dilemmas faced by them must be resolved, to identify the moral issues that are involved in these dilemmas, and to offer reasons justifying what they express.

- **Analysis Approach**

The rationale of the Analysis approach to values education is based on helping students develop logical thinking and using scientific inquiry techniques in solving value issues. Value Analysis also tries to help students develop their own values in response to value conflicts in society. Therefore, Analysis approach leads to the development of logical thinking in students and the use of the scientific method so that they can participate and resolve open conflicts between various groups in society.

- **Clarification Approach**

This approach arose primarily from humanistic psychology and the humanistic education movement, e.g., Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow [6].

The rationale of the Clarification approach is to help students clarify and actualize personal values. This approach also attempts to help students develop both rational thinking and emotional awareness for explaining their personal behavior patterns. According to [16], the clarification approach sees humans as indicators of interaction within society and their environment. Internal rather than external factors are seen as the main factors that determine human behavior. This approach uses a wide range of teaching methods such as self-analysis, listening techniques, games, journals, songs, and interviews.

- **Action Learning Approach**

The rationale of the Action Learning approach is to develop student's abilities to act directly in personal and social situations for displaying their personal values. The action learning approach utilizes many teaching methods that are applied in the Moral Development, Analysis, and Clarification approaches. This approach is related to the efforts of some social studies educators to highlight community based learning rather than classroom based learning.

- **Emotional- Rational Approach**

This approach attempts to help students understand and adopt a lifestyle based on care and consideration for

others as well as for oneself. Reference [12] has listed a variety of methods that can help students know and experience “love in action”. Each method involves small groups of four to ten members. These methods include: 1. Expressive and communication techniques such as speaking, writing prose, poetry and plays, paintings, modelling with clay, and photography; 2. Discussion techniques involving small group and the entire class in discussions; 3. Drama techniques with students writing plays and acting in these themselves; 4. Role playing based on situations common to experiences of students 5. Simulations involving family, school, or community problems and 6. Real life engagement such as helping individuals within the community.

## **COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH TO CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**

Reference [9] stated that in order to develop character in its cognitive, emotional and behavior dimensions, schools need a comprehensive approach. At the State University of New York at Cortland, the Centre for the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> Rs (Respect and Responsibility) defined a comprehensive approach consisting of twelve mutually supportive strategies, nine that are classroom-based and three that are school wide.

**Classroom strategies:** In classroom practice, a comprehensive approach to character-building calls upon the individual teacher to:

- **Acting as a caregiver, model, and mentor**

This is the first component in the teacher’s role. The quality of the teacher’s relationship with students is the foundation of all else a teacher may attempt to fulfill in character education. Firstly, the teacher builds the self-respect of students and treats them in a moral way so that they learn to appreciate the meaning of morality. Working as caregivers the teacher helps the students to succeed in school work. Secondly serving as moral models, teachers demonstrate a high level of respect and responsibility both inside and outside the classroom [10].

- **Creating a caring classroom community**

This relates to teachers instilling respect and caring as active norms in the peer group. Peer culture is a powerful influence on students’ conduct and character. Teachers need to take the initiative to shape a positive peer culture which supports the virtues they attempt to teach. If not, peer culture will take the opposite direction that will create negative peer norms such as cruelty to schoolmates who are different, lacking academic responsibility, and disrespect for authority that will be adverse to developing a good character. As opposed to this, when a teacher successfully creates a moral classroom community, students learn morality by living it. There is sharing of respect and care among their peers which is a give-and-take. When these experiences are repeated, respect and care develop into habits and become parts of their developing character.

- **Practice moral discipline**

Discipline needs to be more than crowd control if it is to develop character. It must help students develop moral reasoning, self-control, and respect for others. Rules that are established must enable students to see the moral values or standards that are behind the rules. Following of rules should be emphasized because it is the right thing to do and because it respects the rights and needs of others rather than placing importance on rewards or punishment. Consequences used for enforcing rules should serve as a moral teacher helping students to understand how a specific rule benefits oneself as well as others, and strengthening their feeling of obligation to follow the rule in the future.

- **Creating a democratic classroom environment**

This means involving students regularly and in developmentally suitable ways, in shared decision making. This will increase their responsibility for making the classroom a good place for them to be and to learn. A democratic classroom will contribute to character development because it provides a forum for addressing any need or problem that may arise in the group. It will also bestow a support structure that will call forth students' best moral selves by holding them accountable to norms of respect and responsibility.

- **Teaching character through the curriculum**

There are several opportunities for teachers to use the morally rich content of academic subjects as a means for teaching virtue. Teachers must study the school curriculum for its moral potential, and this requires teachers to look at their grade level curriculum and search for the moral questions and lessons already present in a particular subject. The teacher should explore how he/she can make those questions and lessons important for the students. For example, a science teacher can design a lesson on the need for accurate and effective reporting of data. A social studies teacher can look into questions of social justice, actual moral issues faced by figures in history and present opportunities for public action for the betterment of one's community or country. A literature teacher can get the students to analyze the moral decisions and the moral strengths and weaknesses in novels, plays and short stories.

- **Using cooperative learning**

Cooperative learning is an instructional process that gives students regular opportunities for developing important social and moral capabilities – the ability to take perspective, the ability to work as part of a team, and the ability to appreciate others, while learning academic material. Cooperative learning also contributes to the development of an interconnected and caring classroom community by breaking down ethnic, racial and other social barriers thereby incorporating every student into the small social structure of the cooperative group.

- **Develop the “Conscience of Craft”**

The literature on moral and character education often treats moral learning and academic learning as separate sectors. But academic work and learning have moral meaning. Work is one of the most basic ways of developing self-discipline and self-worth by people and contributing to the human community. It goes as a mark of someone's character when they do their jobs and other tasks properly. Syracuse University Professor Tom Green calls this a “Conscience of Craft” – which is the capacity one has for feeling satisfied when something is done well and feel ashamed of work done carelessly.

- **Ethical reflection**

This strategy focuses on developing qualities that consist of the cognitive side of character being morally alert, which means knowing the virtues and what these virtues demand of us in real situations; looking at others' perspective which means reasoning morally; making accurate moral decisions; and having moral self-knowledge which includes the capacity for self-criticism. It is especially important to teach students what the virtues are, how their constant practice will lead to finding oneself with a more fulfilled life, and how everyone must assume responsibility for developing one's own character.

- **Teaching conflict resolution**

In character education it is of critical importance to teach students how to resolve conflicts without exerting force or intimidation. This is important for at least two reasons: (1) if a conflict is not settled justly, the

moral community in the classroom will erode; and (2) unless conflict resolution skills are developed in students, they will be morally handicapped in their present inter-personal relationships as well as later in life, which may lead a particular student to contribute to violence in school and later in society.

## **SCHOOL-WIDE STRATEGIES**

School-wide strategies are intended to foster service learning beyond the classroom, create a positive moral culture in the school and recruit parents and the community as partners in character education.

### *The six Es of character education strategy developed by [15]*

In implementation of character education, this six E model has been introduced as a strategy, which are concepts starting with the letter E in English language.

- **Example**

The first is 'example'. Human beings are born civilized; we have to learn almost everything important by example. The great English philosopher Edmund Burke said, "Example is the school of mankind, and he will learn at no other." This speaks of the example the teacher gives the students. Some teachers are those who just teach facts, but the teacher has to be a person who teaches moral values. The students are taught especially by inspiring them through characters, and being role models.

- **Ethos**

'Ethos' comes from the Greek term for the Ethical Environment that must be an integral part of school life. The classroom has some pattern, respecting one another. The moral environment is a critical factor in the classroom through which students reach excellence.

- **Explanation**

The third E which is 'Explanation' is one of the most exhausting aspects of teaching. In addition to teaching, the teacher also explains to the students the importance of living according to certain values. When a student makes queries on why a certain punishment was given, the teacher needs to explain the reasons for same and criteria to be adhered to.

- **Emotion**

The fourth E which is 'Emotion' shows that explanation alone is not sufficient. The teacher also needs to be emotional and encourage the students and guide them overcome disappointments.

- **Experiences**

The fifth E is 'Experiences'. Currently we speak that students should gain experience but they do not have sufficient opportunities for these. Therefore, in order to build self-image, they should be directed to various situations for gaining experiences. They need to be given opportunities within the school itself to gain experience. It is necessary to show them the importance of engaging in co-curricular activities without limiting themselves only to book learning.

- **Expectation for Excellence**

The final E is 'Expectation for excellence'. In educational circles today, excellence means obtaining high test scores. While this may lead to students being more knowledgeable, it also may lead to obtaining better

employment. Yet this could be an educational trap. In the long term, this excellence needs to be linked to character formation which means that students should also take interest in the forming themselves as best as they can.

## IMPLEMENTATION OF CHARACTER EDUCATION

Reference [13] states that character education can be initiated at any Grade level and that it is important to set a strong foundation during the earlier Grades, reinforcing and building upon that foundation in higher Grades. To be effective, the entire school community must be included in character education and it has to be infused throughout the entire school curriculum and culture. Reference [13] briefly described five keys to success of Character Education and the first of these is that Instruction must be planned. Character education does not just happen, but direct instruction must be planned in advance. Secondly it must be applied. Students must be able to apply what they have learnt. Learning the definition of diligence does not do any good to the child if the child does not see it in action. Thirdly it should be teacher friendly which means that all instructional and school-wide components of the program must be as teacher friendly as possible. Then the teachers will accept the program better and teach effectively. The fourth is it should be supported by all. If the program is to reach its fullest potential it must be supported by everyone in the school. School leaders can make it important by providing the necessary materials, scheduling time for the program and assemblies, and talking about it frequently. Lastly prepare the students for it. Middle school and high school often approach the idea of character education with suspicion. There must be substantial, well-planned efforts to create a school climate that is favorable to maximum buy-in by students.

## CONCLUSION

This paper attempted to critically explore how the concept of character education has been illustrated and to search how the contents and strategies based on character education are being used in the field of education. It consisted of reviewing character education as an emerging approach in in core values as expressed relevant literature including e-literature. There were major themes identified, such as, Definitions of Character Education, Principles of effective character education, Ways of teaching values, Comprehensive approach to character development, and Implementation of Character Education. The importance of the role of parents and teachers and the school environment as a whole, and the importance of stakeholders were stressed. Literature not only emphasized moral knowledge and moral feelings but also prioritized on the aspects of action or appreciation of moral values in real life. Character education is addressed for preparing the young generation to be more ready to face life's challenges and those that they eventually face as global challenges.

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