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**Character Education – An Essential Tool Dealing the Complexity of Life****Dr. Ravikiran. B**Principal  
Jai Hind B.Ed College  
Kalaburgi.**Abstract**

*Should we be worried seeing around us? Many observers say that we should. We see evidence of or antisocial behavior than ever among our youth a sort of divorce between personal ethics and everyday behavior. Even among our most academically talented students, personal interest seems to triumph over the common good. From across the political spectrum come calls to address the problem, as people from left, right, and center however differently they may understand morality recognize that building character is everyone's business.*

*Several factors have swung the pendulum back in the other direction. First is the growing recognition that families and religious institutions need help. Competing with them for moral authority are peers and the mass media, which all too often lead young people in troubling directions. Schools have become necessary partners with parents in the race for a balancing influence.*

*Also, as educators, we have come to recognize the essential moral elements already present throughout the curriculum especially in the literature we read, the history we discuss, the science we implement, the behaviors we model and reinforce, the relationships we develop, and the virtues we promote every day. Ignoring this moral substance in the interest of neutrality simply shirks our responsibility to educate persons whose thought has some well-reasoned content. The only real question left to us is whether we will approach the moral dimensions of the curriculum poorly or well; we cannot sidestep them.*

*Character education means creating a culture that calls for everyone in the school community to be the best people they can be. Character education programs that work are, in fact, a giant mutual-improvement process involving students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders. But if character education is integrated into the content and processes of instruction, educational institutions can become models of ethical thought and values. The work of character education in institutions and homes always starts with the adults. When we talk about the moral decline of our youth, we are often just observing our own reflection in the children who learned what we modeled. As teachers and parents, we must demonstrate not only the right behavior but also the kind of thoughtfulness that makes a moral education more than the human version of obedience institution. At its best, character education cultivates an appreciation for the power of story, reflection, and the essential tools of habit and reason in dealing with the complexities of daily life.*

**Introduction**

Should we be worried seeing around us? Many observers say that we should. We see evidence of more antisocial behavior than ever among our youth a sort of divorce between personal ethics and everyday behavior. Even among our most academically talented students, personal interest seems to triumph over the common good. From across the political spectrum come calls to address the problem, as people from left, right, and center however differently they may understand morality recognize that building character is everyone's business. Several factors have swung the pendulum back in the other direction. First is the growing recognition that families and religious institutions need help. Competing with them for moral authority are peers and the mass media,

which all too often lead young people in troubling directions. Schools have become necessary partners with parents in the race for a balancing influence.

Also, as educators, we have come to recognize the essential moral elements already present throughout the curriculum especially in the literature we read, the history we discuss, the science we implement, the behaviors we model and reinforce, the relationships we develop, and the virtues we promote every day. Ignoring this moral substance in the interest of neutrality simply shirks our responsibility to educate persons whose thought has some well-reasoned content. The only real question left to us is whether we will approach the moral dimensions of the curriculum poorly or well; we cannot sidestep them.

### **Affective and Effective Approaches**

In the latter half of this century, Educational institutions have gone from benign neglect or fearful avoidance of moral education into three somewhat sequential movements: affective approaches such as values clarification and self-esteem building; moral decision making; and most recently, character education. Values clarification was a popular affective approach that stressed individual selfreflection on values over the promotion of any specific values. While the program had a worthy objective, it did not deliver as intended. We realized there were choices we simply didn't want students to feel good about, and no increase in clarity would make the unacceptable acceptable. Contemporary educators are often queasy about anything that smacks of indoctrination, but we can become downright imperialistic about academic honesty, respect for self and others, and violence-free institutions.

Another affective but not so effective approach was self-esteem building. Educators hoped that natural goodness would follow from a stronger sense of self and appreciation for self and others. It didn't. In fact, among the greatest puzzles faced in self-esteem research is that chronic criminal offenders tend to have high self-esteem (produced from pride in antisocial accomplishments), whereas many of the most altruistic and productive members of society show low self-esteem. While affective approaches have not contributed a reliable means for schools to develop ethics, they have made valuable contributions, especially in recognizing the importance of the emotions, as well as the intellect, and the importance of school climate increasing an environment where character can develop.

### **The Limits of Moral Decision Making**

The next approach is was moral decision making, which concentrated on the study of ethical principles and their application to dilemmas such as euthanasia or capital punishment. Moral decision making assumed that under the right conditions, student would figure out ethical principles for themselves and generalize what they learned to their everyday moral opportunities. But the problems taught were rarely situated in the children's own real lives. The abstract principles were hard for students to retrieve in situations where, for example, they could save themselves pain by lying and they could not see a connection between their lying and the abstract ideals they had learned.

The result of decision making approaches, some suggest, is students who can discourse articulately on the minutiae of assisted suicide but have far greater trouble bringing this enlightenment to their daily moral opportunities. They may know whom to throw off the life raft, but they cannot relate these ideas to the more common choices they face: Should they dump their

date for the school dance because the person they really wanted to go with finally asked them? Certainly there are particularly difficult situations where we need the assistance that formal ethical decision making offers. But ethics is not just about the hardest choices we will ever have to make; it is also about what we do all day every day. This brings up a simple observation about the moral life: Most of the time—really, nearly all of the time— we know what we ought to do. We're just having trouble doing it. Perhaps institutions should be more concerned about helping students create the conditions in their lives where they will more consistently do what they know they should. This approach is character education—honing the moral compass from which we operate and developing skills to cope with what gets in the way of being moral.

### **The Habits of Moral Behavior**

Character has more to do with habits and dispositions than decisions. Truth be told, we tend to do in any given situation what we usually do in similar situations and have been doing for some time. Thus, the best way I can improve my moral behavior tomorrow is to improve what I do today. The habits I acquire now not only constitute my current character but also form it for the future. Developing traits such as honesty and self-control will help respond more automatically as an ethical person would.

Part of character education is encouraging the acquisition of these habits by offering students effective role models, both in real life and through stories and heroes. (See "A Lesson in Perspective") For better or worse, the character we form is very much influenced by the character of the role models we choose. Jerome Stumphauzer notes that kids most prone for delinquency were encouraged in that behavior by antisocial role models and redirected to better behavior by prosocial role models. In either case, the role models who were most available to kids and real to them had the most effect—a stunning endorsement for time and integrity. Neither parents nor schools can significantly impact the moral development of children without daily, individual connection. One of our major goals in influencing moral behavior is to insure that we are in the loop, so that as kids consider the moral dimensions of their lives, caring adults have a chance to influence the outcome.

As much as parents and schools need to model what good moral character looks like, they also need to teach students how to deal with the things that get in the way of moral behavior. Students are most likely not to do what they know they ought when they are in angry and intensely emotional situations; when peers pressure them; when personal or academic honesty works against their own self interest; or when they are involved in patterns of self-destructive, drug/alcohol-related, gang, or delinquent behavior. Students can learn practical ways to overcome these obstacles. They need training in anger control, social skills, conflict resolution, dealing with hostile people, and situational perception (not finding trouble where it isn't intended).

### **Creating an Ethical Educational Climate**

Finally, character education means creating a culture that calls for everyone in the school community to be the best people they can be. Character education programs that work are, in fact, a giant mutual-improvement process involving students, teachers, administrators, parents, and other stakeholders. None of this is easy, especially given all the things we are already asking schools to do. When we talk with teachers about character education, they usually are enthusiastic about the idea but daunted by the problem of fitting it into crammed curricula. Their time seems overwhelmed by bureaucratic tasks, and they are hampered by the recent elimination of in-service days during the

school year. But if character education is integrated into the content and processes of instruction, educational institutions can become models of ethical thought and values. When the institutions to set up a character education program, the project begins with everyone in the community considering the question: Who are we when we are at our best? Based on that discussion, we agree on a set of core virtues for the institutions and a code of conduct to support them. The virtues and the code are then explicitly taught.

Faculty identifies elements of the curriculum that support the virtues and add other materials on ethics. Ethical decision making is taught and practiced throughout, but it is supplemented by training in reflection, coping skills, and cooperation. Just as important, faculty work at being available, credible role models of the virtues. In this, they are joined by parents, who can receive help through the school in strategies for raising ethical students. These can include such important skills as maintaining a daily dialogue with a student; connecting with his or her friends; effective, consistent reinforcement of desired behaviors; and skillful reduction of undesired behaviors. The work of character education in institutions and homes always starts with the adults. When we talk about the moral decline of our youth, we are often just observing our own reflection in the children who learned what we modelled. As teachers and parents, we must demonstrate not only the right behavior but also the kind of thoughtfulness that makes moral education more than the human version of obedience institution. At its best, character education cultivates an appreciation for the power of story, reflection, and the essential tools of habit and reason in dealing with the complexities of daily life.

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