

Chapter 5

Character Education Movement

In spite of the anticultural movement, there is a strong cry across our nation from parents, teachers, and legislators that schools should teach character. Currently many states are mandating character education in public schools. The violence and shootings at schools have shocked the American public. Too many children trained in the relativistic philosophy of individual autonomy have turned into cruel monsters without a conscience. *Education Week* in “Youths’ Lack of Values, Character Worries American Public,” states:

The American public is anxious about an apparent crisis in the moral well-being of children and teenagers, and parents and schools are largely to blame, a national survey has found.

More than six in 10 adults, or 61 percent, said youngsters’ failure to learn such values as honesty, respect, and responsibility is a very serious problem, according to the study. Only 37 percent believe today’s children, once they’re grown, will make the United States a better place.

“The traditional ideal of children as a source of renewal and hope has, for the majority of the American public, been seriously undermined,” reports the study, “Kids These Days: What Americans Really Think About the Next Generation.” ...

Adults’ overriding concern about children is not health problems, safety, or poverty—topics so often the focus of professional child advocates—but rather their character and values, the report says.¹

Glen Elsasser of the *Chicago Tribune* also points out what is happening in schools concerning character education. He writes:

McGuffey’s Readers offered literacy and lessons on the importance of obedience, honesty, kindness and thrift. But their popularity and use subsided, with the type of teaching they represented ebbing and flowing over the succeeding decades.

Now, at the end of the 1990’s, a movement known as character education has gained obvious momentum and in the process is reviving what seem to be distinctly McGuffey-like values.

Unlike the days of McGuffey, however, the teaching of values and virtues has been

expanded far beyond reading and writing classes to all academic subjects and extracurricular activities.

From the early days of the American republic, character and education were classroom verities—or as Diane Ravitch, a Brookings Institution fellow and New York University expert on education, said recently, character was always implicit in education.

The sources of the resurgence are varied: local schools, state education agencies and nonprofit organizations and foundations, with the federal government offering financial incentives to ensure that student values and ethics are part of the lesson plan.²

Traditional Values Taught

Prior to World War I, teaching of traditional values was common in public education. Then came the belief that since people were steadily improving, there was no need to teach traditional values. Bonnin-dell Clouse, professor of educational psychology at Indiana State University, pointed out, “The thirties, forties, and early fifties were a time of optimism based on a philosophy of social evolution that said that people are getting better and better. It seemed, therefore, that they did not need specific training to improve.”³

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I remember in the '30s when I attended public school that the teacher went around the room checking if we carried a handkerchief and if our fingernails were clean. As time went on, problems began: World War II, Korea, Vietnam, and dictators emerged and slaughtered millions. *Time* presents this report about philosopher Allan Bloom at the University of Chicago, from his provocative book, *The Closing of the American Mind*:

In Bloom's analysis, the universities went seriously off course in the 1960s, when they succumbed to pressures from student activists, feminists and black radicals for more "relevance" in the curriculum. This coalition hardened into a leftish tyranny whose demands, asserts Bloom, wounded American universities as sorely as right-wing assaults damaged German higher education during Hitler's rise. He defines the U.S. movement's essence, which he calls cultural relativism, as a half-digested export version of the nihilistic Nietzschean doctrine that underlay the trashing in Germany. Such relativism, says Bloom, broke down higher education's traditional role as defender of real enlightenment against society's ephemera, leaving the universities open to the "radical subjectivity of

all belief about good and evil,” as well as to a primacy of self that demanded equal time for anyone’s own thing. This egalitarian “education of openness,” as Bloom brands it, was a reform without content, accepting everything and denying the power of reason to pursue the common good....

He calls for a return to the reasoned insights to be gained from classical philosophy. He warns that for Americans, whose government was founded upon reason, the present “crisis in the university, the home of reason, is perhaps the profoundest crisis they face.”⁴

In the seventies, there was a cry for values. The educational system responded. They presented values clarification as the way to plant values into the lives of children. Now parents could be relieved that schools were once again teaching values.

Values Clarification

Values clarification, however, was another subtle approach to incorporate relativism. *Values Clarification*, by Sidney B. Simon, Leland W. Howe, and Howard Kirschenbaum, acclaimed as the most widely known and used book in the new field of values education during that time, cites a strategy that “illustrates how

difficult it is for any one teacher to say, "I have the right values for other people's children." Here's a problem from their book:

The Alligator River Story: Once upon a time there was a woman named Abigail who was in love with a man named Gregory. Gregory lived on the shore of a river. Abigail lived on the opposite shore of the river. The river which separated the two lovers was teeming with man-eating alligators. Abigail wanted to cross the river to be with Gregory. Unfortunately, the bridge had been washed out. So she went to ask Sinbad, a river boat captain, to take her across. He said he would be glad to if she would consent to go to bed with him preceding the voyage. She promptly refused and went to a friend named Ivan to explain her plight. Ivan did not want to be involved at all in the situation. Abigail felt her only alternative was to accept Sinbad's terms. Sinbad fulfilled his promise to Abigail and delivered her into the arms of Gregory.

When she told Gregory about her amorous escapade in order to cross the river, Gregory cast her aside with disdain. Heartsick and dejected, Abigail turned to Slug with her tale of woe. Slug, feeling compassion for Abigail, sought out Gregory and beat him brutally.

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Abigail was overjoyed at the sight of Gregory getting his due. As the sun sets on the horizon, we hear Abigail laughing at Gregory.⁵

After hearing this story, children are to “privately rank the five characters from the most offensive character to the least objectionable.”⁶ They are divided into groups of four to discuss the pros and cons of each character. Imagine immature boys and girls debating the pros and cons of sex to gain favor in a nonjudgmental atmosphere.

Other controversial moral issues are examined. One such activity is “survival games.” Children are divided into groups. Suddenly World War III begins, with bombs dropping everywhere. People are running for shelters, and the class group is in charge of these shelters. A desperate call is received from a fallout shelter where ten people want to enter, but to survive the necessary three months there’s enough space, air, food, and water for only six. The group has exactly one-half hour to decide which ones will enter before they themselves must seek protection. Here are the individuals:

1. Bookkeeper; 31 years old
2. His wife; six months pregnant
3. Black militant; second-year medical student
4. Famous historian-author; 42 years old
5. Hollywood starlette; singer; dancer
6. Bio-chemist

7. Rabbi; 54 years old
8. Olympic athlete; all sports
9. College co-ed
10. Policeman with gun (they cannot be separated)

The teacher distributes copies of this list to the class and then counts down: 15-, 10-, 5-, and then 1-minute warnings.⁷ Instead of seeking ways to find out how to save all ten, children are asked to decide who will die. This is an ideal strategy to teach children early that it's permissible to kill certain individuals.

Autonomous Children

Everything children have been taught is taken apart and clarified: religion, sex, family, parents, feelings, attitudes, problems, etc. Nothing is personal or sacred. Children must be autonomous and decide freely, immature and unwise as they are and without parental input, their own set of values.

Values clarification often places children into dilemma situations in which they must make decisions between two wrong choices. It often deals with situations that in all likelihood will never happen, and some situations in which even philosophers would have difficulty in deciding what to do. Instead of teaching positive morality, it stresses situation ethics. Its effect destroys traditional values. Values clarification also indoctrinates children until they lose their sense

of shame over evil and accept degenerate behavior as normal. The pros and cons of drugs, homosexuality, lesbianism, premarital sex, prostitution, lying, stealing, infanticide, euthanasia, and suicide are likely to be discussed while nonjudgmental teachers carefully avoid imposing their values.

Some will say, "You can't legislate morality," as an excuse to promote moral relativism. If one can't legislate morality, then one can't punish indecent behavior, cheating, stealing, and killing. Of course society must legislate morality. We can't let criminals run free or naked people run through our streets. Sensible laws are passed both for schools and society based on reason and common sense.

Others contend values should be taught at home and not in school. True, homes should play a major factor in teaching morals, but morals should be taught everywhere. Honesty, self-control, respect, responsibility, caring, courage, citizenship, etc, are values that should be encouraged everywhere; whereas cheating, lying, fighting, bullying, hating, etc., are negative values that should be condemned.

Governor Mike Huckabee of Arkansas said in his book, *Character Is the Issue*, "Our character defines the world we live in. Our government, welfare programs, schools, and everything else in our lives are shaped and directed according to our character...In fact every law in the country is a reflection of our moral values. We have laws against murder and stealing because

we believe they are morally wrong.”⁸

Others will criticize character education programs as ineffective. They will be if the schools are teaching character in the abstract. There must be a climate of character within the entire school. Teachers cannot expect students to be honest just because they had a lesson on honesty. If students cheat, they should be punished. If students disrupt classes, corrective action should be taken. If bullying takes place, the bullies need to be disciplined. Teachers and principals must be given the right to discipline unruly children. Sadly, educational leaders often tie the hands of teachers and principals in matters of discipline.

To contend schools should not teach values is impossible—all education in one form or another teaches values. Take American history: either one condemns slavery or one condones it. To remain neutral is in effect condoning slavery for those believing in slavery. If tests are given: either one condemns cheating or accepts it. Values are inherent in education. One cannot be morally neutral. The question should be asked—what values should be taught?

Character Education Programs Examined

The teachings of relativism have permeated our educational system. A teacher posed this problem to a group of eleven-year-old students, “What if you were

eighteen years old and found yourself pregnant?" No guidance was given, except for one rule, "You may not say that any problem or solution is right or wrong." The teacher by saying, "You may not say that any problem or solution is right or wrong," is trying to be morally neutral and nonjudgmental; however, this is a definite moral position. It is moral relativism—there are no moral absolutes. Moral neutrality is an illusion—one cannot be morally neutral. Either you are for or against premarital sex. If you say, "I take no position on premarital sex," that's a moral decision saying it is proper for some to engage in premarital sex.

Moral relativism, under the guise of tolerance, is a serious attack on traditional values, and it threatens the very fabric of our society. Concerned individuals need to make sure that when schools speak of teaching character education they are not reviving values clarification where all values are personal, subjective, and relative, neither right or wrong. With such a value system, intolerance and tyranny can be chosen as virtues just as freedom, justice, and human dignity.

John Leo in *U.S. News & World Report* states, "73 percent of the students said that when their professors taught about ethical issues, the usual message was that uniform standards of right and wrong don't exist." Then he told of a college professor in upstate New York who "reported that 10 percent to

20 percent of his students could not bring themselves to criticize the Nazi extermination of Europe's Jews. Some students expressed personal distaste for what the Nazis did. But they were not willing to say that the Nazis were wrong, since no culture can be judged from the outside and no individual can challenge the moral worldview of another."⁹

In another article, Leo points out, "Overdosing on nonjudgmentalism is a growing problem in the schools. Two disturbing articles in the *Chronicle of Higher Education* say that some students are unwilling to oppose large moral horrors, including human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing, and slavery, because they think that no one has the right to criticize the moral views of another group or culture." Leo adds, "Christina Hoff Sommers, author and professor of philosophy at Clark University in Massachusetts, says that students who can't bring themselves to condemn the Holocaust will often say flatly that treating humans as superior to dogs and rodents is immoral. Moral shrugging may be on the rise, but old-fashioned and rigorous moral criticism is alive and well on certain selected issues: smoking, environmentalism, women's rights, animal rights."¹⁰

These nonjudgmentalists are being hypocritical by claiming no one has a right to judge others, while they judge others on selected issues. For example, Leo told of Kay Haugaard, a teacher of creative writing at Pasadena City College in California, who asked a

student if she believed in human sacrifice. The woman replied, "I really don't know. If it was a religion of long standing...." Haugaard wrote, "I was stunned. This was the woman who wrote so passionately of saving the whales, of concern for the rain forests, of her rescue and tender care of a stray dog."¹¹

One may be puzzled why some can be so passionate about saving whales, baby seals, and dogs, yet be advocates for homosexuality, lesbianism, euthanasia, infanticide, and abortion. Since humans are the enemy of the environment, any method to depopulate the earth is noteworthy.

One of the most shocking examples of loss of character in America is how members of Congress and even our former president supported the barbarous act of partial birth abortion. Imagine a perfectly innocent full-term baby ready to be born, and a doctor is lawfully permitted to puncture a hole into the child's skull and suck out its brain. Yet one minute later, if that same child happened to be out of the womb, that same act would constitute murder! Ancient civilizations had another way of getting rid of children; they threw them into a fire to appease their gods.

Tolerance is an excellent virtue when it concerns the treatment of people, but it is totally unacceptable when it states that all views are equally valid. Children should be taught to respect life and to oppose the moral horrors of human sacrifice, ethnic cleansing, and slavery. Unfortunately, there are those

under the guise of teaching character education who do not support positive values. Concerned individuals need to make sure that the proper programs are implemented. The virtues that should be taught are the time-tested common sense values that have been passed down for thousands of years, such as respect, trustworthiness, caring, fairness, responsibility, self-discipline, perseverance, citizenship, and courage. ”

Cultural War

We are in a cultural war—it’s a conflict between the forces of relativism with its insistence on individual autonomy, and those believing in moral absolutes and individual responsibility. It’s not just about immoral textbooks, sexual license, abortion, or violent movies and TV; it’s much more. The conflict is over America’s worldview in governing our nation.

We have yet to reap all the disastrous effects of this permissive immoral education implanted in the hearts and minds of our youth. Many of our youth today are filled with the detrimental hedonistic philosophy of moral relativism that brings havoc upon themselves and on our society. Much of the good left in America results from the inertia of our historic moral values, but this borrowing from the past cannot continue. There must be a renewal of historic virtues to keep America strong. Our earlier constitutional democracy inspired nations to emulate us.

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We believe democracy is the answer for many nations of the world that are still dominated by dictators instead of the majority of the people. But one of the greatest hindrances of democracy is what's happening with our present brand of freedom that results in broken homes, violence, drug abuse, crime, juvenile delinquency, degenerate TV programs, perverted sex, and an epidemic of venereal diseases?

This is not the America that our Founding Fathers envisioned. Listen to what George Washington said in his first inaugural address: "The foundation of our national policy will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality...the indissoluble union between virtue and happiness."¹² How many more nations would want to imitate our democracy if we lived by these principles?

William Kilpatrick in *Why Johnny Can't Tell Right From Wrong* cites this report of what's happening to many of the textbooks that children are reading:

On the elementary and high school level the stock of knowledge about right and wrong has dwindled even more drastically. In 1985 Professor Paul Vitz of New York University reported the results of a comprehensive study of ninety widely used elementary social studies texts, high school history texts, and elementary readers. What Vitz discovered was a "censorship by omission" in which basic themes and

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facts of the American and Western experience had been left out. Of the 670 stories from the readers used in grades three through six, only five dealt with any patriotic theme; moreover, “there are no stories that feature helping others or being concerned for others as intrinsically meaningful and valuable.” “For the most part,” writes Vitz, “these are stories for the ‘me generation.’” More seriously, religion and marriage—institutions that have traditionally provided a context for learning morality—are neglected: None of the social studies books dealing with modern American social life mentioned the word “marriage,” “wedding,” “husband” or “wife.”¹³

Can we let these shocking statistics sink in, “Of the 670 stories from the readers used in grades three through six, only five dealt with any patriotic theme,” and “none of the social studies books dealing with modern American social life mentioned the word ‘marriage,’ ‘wedding,’ ‘husband’ or ‘wife.’” There needs to be a moral outcry over what’s happening in education today.

If the full implications of relativism were evident to the American people, they would be overwhelmingly opposed, and our historical value system would be restored. To counteract relativism, all Americans believing in the virtues that made our nation

successful should boldly proclaim these morals and insist textbooks promote them also. But expect stiff opposition.

One of the favorite tactics of those believing in moral relativism is to label the opposition as bigoted, right wing, judgmental, intolerant, and one of their favorite ones: imposing religious values. By labeling the opposition in such terms, they don't have to explain or defend their position. But we mustn't let them silence us. The philosophy of relativism versus our historical value system is not only an issue for our schools, but also the major factors in how our country is governed. We must also reject judicial activism that seeks to rewrite our Constitution; instead, we need to diligently study the objectives of this historical document.

Today's fanatical obsession of separation of church and state is a perversion of the Constitution. A careful reading of the Constitution and the actions of Congress at that time clearly reveal what our Founding Fathers believed. The First Amendment of the Constitution, also called the Bill of Rights, states:

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.¹⁴

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The Founding Fathers wanted to forbid the establishment of a national church by the federal government; they had no intention of limiting public religious expression. Notice that the Bill of Rights clearly states that Congress shall make no law “prohibiting the free exercise” of religion, “or abridging the freedom of speech.” However, today it has been construed by many to mean that no teaching, views, insights, or values of the church can permeate or be accepted in public or governmental institutions. This position violates the very Bill of Rights it aims to protect by suppressing the rights of individuals to freely exercise their beliefs.

This emasculation of God from our country under the guise of “separation of Church and State,” is not a constitutional concept. The character-building principles resulting from faith God has been the bedrock of our nation. We don’t want a state church; but we should also not want a state totally devoid of belief in God. The First Amendment never intended to remove God from public life. To find out how our Founding Fathers felt about expressing God in public life, one must go to religious sources; secular forces have generally purged many of our historical documents from reaching the masses. (See www.wallbuilders.com)

Under President Clinton’s administration, the United States Government published a paper on

Religious Expression in Public Schools: A Statement of Principles. These are several excerpts from that statement:

Student prayer and religious discussion:

The Establishment Clause of the First Amendment does not prohibit purely private religious speech by students. Students therefore have the same right to engage in individual or group prayer and religious discussion during the school day as they do to engage in other comparable activity.

Teaching about religion: Public schools may not provide religious instruction, but they may teach about religion, including the Bible or other scripture: the history of religion, comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture)-as-literature, and the role of religion in the history of the United States and other countries all are permissible public school subjects.

Student assignments: Students may express their beliefs about religion in the form of homework, art-work, and other written and oral assignments free of discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions.

Religious literature: Students have a right to distribute religious literature to their school-mates on the same terms as they are permitted

to distribute other literature that is unrelated to school curriculum or activities.

Teaching values: Though schools must be neutral with respect to religion, they may play an active role with respect to teaching civic values and virtue, and the moral code that holds us together as a community. The fact that some of these values are held also by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.¹⁵

These guidelines state very clearly what teachers and students are allowed to do. Teachers cannot proselytize, but they have every right to allow religious expression in their classes. And in teaching character education, the guidelines specifically say, “The fact that some of these values are held also by religions does not make it unlawful to teach them in school.”

Dr. Daniel Hade, Associate Professor of Education at Pennsylvania State University, and Dr. Jacqueline Edmondson, Assistant Professor of Education at the same school, stated in an article they co-authored, “Children’s Book Publishing in Neoliberal Times”:

Since the beginning of children’s book publishing in the eighteenth century, children’s books have provided children with entertainment and have contributed to the intellectual

lives of children. But good children's literature can provide more than entertainment and an educated mind (Huck, 1982¹⁶). Children's literature can nurture children's spiritual lives as well. Through literature, children can experience the joys of being alive, find understanding and compassion for those who suffer, co-create with artists and authors using language and visual images, and transform joy into celebration and suffering into justice (Hade, 2002¹⁷). In other words, children can learn about being human.¹⁸

It's time for America to reject moral relativism and return to its traditional foundation of moral values. The future prosperity of our nation hinges on which philosophy gains ascendancy. It is crucial for the dedicated few that understand that our national values should be based upon our moral heritage to go forth and stir the American people to action. There needs to be a moral cry from every hamlet, town, and city for the restoration of the historical values as provided by our Founding Fathers to bring our youth and nation out of moral chaos and disintegration.

Entrenched Bureaucracy

There are entrenched educational bureaucracies strongly opposed to our moral heritage. America

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needs a parental revolution to incorporate character education. Many teachers are unaware of the ramifications of their teaching methods; they have been trained in relativistic procedures and they continue to follow what they have been taught. They need to be provided with books and literature exposing the relativistic philosophy. Some teachers will change after learning the full implications of their teaching methods.

Concerned citizens cannot stand idly by and watch the systematic destruction of American youth become totally demoralized to the point of accepting perverted sex and degenerate behavior that current non-judgmental programs are propagating. Does America have an established value system? Absolutely! Americans need to rise up and promote virtues that are consistent with the beliefs our nation was founded upon and that made our nation great. These virtues have a proven track record.