



MAY I ASK YOU SOME QUESTIONS?

This blog, as you will note, begins with two quotes that will frame the questions that are constantly raised when we talk about character and character education with educators and others.

“Students who can effectively manage their emotions and behavior tend to do better in their coursework and on assessments. In fact, students who report high self-management are 75 percent less likely to face failing grades than students who report low self-management.”

– Panorama Research Team

Paul Tough, *How Children Succeed: Grit, Curiosity, and the Hidden Power of Character* (2012), suggests that what matters to children and youth is adults’ (home, school, community) abilities to “nurture the development of a very different set of qualities, a list that includes persistence, self-control, curiosity, conscientiousness, grit, and self-confidence. Economists refer to these qualities as non-cognitive skills, psychologists call them personality traits, and the rest of us think of these traits as character.”

What do we know about character?

There are no character genes—**character is** taught to the young by social media, the Internet, the environment they live in, their peers and role models, and hopefully by parents, teachers, schools, youth agencies, and religious institutions.

- **Character is** about **strengths** and **virtues** that guide an individual “to act in an ethical, pro-social manner.”
- **Character is** about **choices**—the ones we make daily (good or bad, ethical or unethical). It is about decision-making—the circumstances, the risks, the chances, the consequences, and the rewards.
- **Character is** about **relationships and social skills**—skills such as sharing, participating, following directions, and listening. It is learning how to be a friend, how to care for others, how to appreciate others, how to be polite, respectful, courteous, and how to resolve conflicts peacefully.
- **Character is** about “**emotional**” **self-discipline**.

To assist administrators, teachers, and others in schools, we offer nine questions about character education that address the **WHAT and HOW**.

1. What is the environment/climate of the school and what should it be?
Our answer is that at the very least it should be: Safe – Caring – Civil – Challenging - Empowering.

2. What outcomes do school personnel, parents, and students desire for students who have attended the school for three or four years?
Our answer is this question should be based on at least three categories: character, career, and citizenship.
3. What character traits/virtues that should permeate the curricula and co-curricula programs at the school?
The answer to this question must be a list agreed upon by the school's stakeholders and incorporated into the mission of the school.
4. What thinking, communication, and social skills should permeate all subjects, programs, and instruction?
5. What special/intervention programs should be implemented to promote the character development of students, to enhance their social and emotional skills, and to foster their leadership and citizenship skills?
6. What must school personnel do to be sure that all school stakeholders are on the same page relative to the answers to the questions above?
7. What are the EXPECTATIONS for students regarding their behaviors?
8. What are the EXPECTATIONS regarding relationships at your school?
 - Students and students / students and parents / adult and students?
 - Teachers and parents / teachers and parents and administrators?
 - School and community?
9. How will school personnel (all stakeholders) know that their efforts to do the above have paid-off?
 - How will programs and efforts be assessed?
 - How will students' academic, social, emotional, and character behaviors and actions be assessed and evaluated?

Then we are always asked –**Do character education initiatives work?**

A national survey and report (Character.org) described three essential life-long skills that must be taught to children and young adults.

1. “Social skills and awareness (e.g., communications skills, active listening, relationship skills, assertiveness, social awareness).
2. Personal improvement/Self-management and awareness (e.g., self-control, goal setting, relaxation techniques, self-awareness, emotional awareness).
3. Problem-solving/Decision-making.”

The report states: *“They found that schools that score higher on implementation of a variety of character education aspects also have higher state achievement scores. Most notably, such higher scores were most consistently and strongly related to the following four aspects of character education:*

- 1) Parent and teacher modeling of character and promotion of character education;*
- 2) Quality opportunities for students to engage in service activities;*
- 3) Promoting a caring community and positive social relationships; and*
- 4) Ensuring a clean and safe physical environment.”*

“The aim of education is not the knowledge of facts but of values.

—Dean William R. Inge

Ed DeRoche, Director, Character Education Resource Center, University of San Diego
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