
Character- Centered Teaching[®]

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A Guide to Creating Teachable Moments for Character Education

Revised Edition

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Introduction

Why Character Education?

Character education initiatives help children develop the guiding principles they need to cope with an increasingly complex world and to feel more emotionally connected to others as well as to enhance prospects for personal life and career success. The key to effective character education is a comprehensive approach that is based on children's needs and structured so that guiding principles are transformed into guiding practices. A comprehensive initiative can be organized so that buildings, classrooms, staff, and curriculum facilitate student learning. With a comprehensive approach to character education, perhaps today's students can help strengthen the family, the workplace, and the nation in the new century.

The approach presented in this guidebook to promote good character is Character-Centered Teaching.

What is Character-Centered Teaching?

Character-Centered Teaching provides a framework for integrating character education concepts into a teacher's style of teaching academic subjects. It is based on the idea that developing good character in students begins with the teacher modeling positive character attributes and actively coaching students to learn and practice the guiding principles that form the basis of sound character.

Character-Centered Teaching is founded on the knowledge that there is a clear relationship between sound character and academic achievement. While this fact is intuitive as well as having been demonstrated through research, there has been little emphasis on using character education programs to promote academic success and to decrease disruptive behavior. Character-Centered Teaching makes a clear statement that promoting sound character leads to high academic standards and positive interpersonal relationships.

The approach of Character-Centered Teaching acknowledges the fact that teachers are an important source of social influence for students. Social influence is based primarily on the style of interacting that occurs every day, both in and out of the classroom. Just as there are styles of leadership, there are also styles of teaching. A style of teaching may be based simply on an individual's personality, but to become an effective

teacher requires learning the skills, methods, and strategies that have proved successful.

A character-centered approach to teaching is a systematic method for providing academic instruction *through* a teaching style that emphasizes positive character attributes. This emphasis is made evident in terms of the way teachers relate to students as well as integrate guiding principles of sound character into the content of classroom lessons. The approach is practiced through four interactive roles: coaching, supporting, directing, and empowering. Specific skills, methods, and strategies are applied within each role for the purpose of developing positive character in students and thereby assisting them to achieve high academic standards.

How to Use This Guidebook

Character-Centered Teaching can be used as a framework to guide the development of a character education initiative or to enhance an existing program. It can also be the basis for staff development workshops by using the videotape provided and the staff development exercises at the end of the chapters.

To conduct a staff development workshop, familiarize yourself with the contents of each chapter. Decide what goals need to be accomplished and use the chapter(s) that are relevant to achieve the goals. Then, review the four-part videotape while following along with “Outline of the Four Video Segments,” in Chapter XIII.

- Chapter I provides history and background on character education in America and a discussion of why character education is critically important for students today. Chapters II and III define terms, concepts, and guiding principles.
- Chapters III and XII can help to guide the development of a character education initiative.
- Chapters IV, VI, VII, and VIII describe skills and tools teachers can use to enhance their ability to promote guiding principles and make character education a natural part of instruction and the school culture.
- The plastic sleeve has handouts, including posters for classrooms, the Teacher’s Toolbox for planning lessons, resources for character-centered discussions, and other supplementary materials.

Character-Centered Teaching

The Guidebook is not designed to deliver a specific, focused character education program. Rather, it is a resource from which to develop a comprehensive initiative that meets the needs of the school and community.



Seven Secrets to Success in Character Education

1. Develop a high profile, well-coordinated program.
2. Make a long-term commitment to character education.
3. Develop and maintain community support.
4. Begin with the character-building activities already in place.
5. Let staff who are already committed take the lead.
6. Develop a clear, focused, and consistent message based on the community's key guiding principles.
7. Establish a three-year staff development plan to involve and train all staff.



Character-Centered Teaching in Action

Action Steps for Developing a Character Education Initiative

- Develop a plan to form a Community Advisory Panel
 - Specify the key people who need to be involved
 - Be sure to include faculty, administrators, parents, students, and community leaders
- Decide on an appropriate time frame for the panel to accomplish its goals
 - Depending on community needs, the panel may meet for a one-day workshop, attend a two-day retreat, or decide to have two-hour meetings monthly for up to six months
- Discuss the critical question that sets the tone for all the goals that the panel will pursue:
 - “What do we want our children/students to **be like** when they graduate from high school?”
 - Develop a vision of what the panel wants the initiative to be
 - Decide on the community’s key guiding principles
- Develop a two-year action plan to involve and train **all** staff
- Begin with the character-building activities already in place
 - Incorporate the community’s key guiding principles
 - Make the activities more rigorous and relevant
- Start the school year with a well-planned assembly to highlight the character education initiative
 - Make the initiative multidimensional, with colorful signs, music, and participation
 - Involve the athletic, art, and music departments, as well as any others that will contribute
 - Involve parents, students, community leaders, faculty, and administrators
- End the school year with a similar well-planned assembly
 - Review events of the year related to the character education initiative
 - Praise the efforts of parents, students, and others

Character-Centered Teaching

Character-Centered Teaching in Action



Action Steps for Staff Development

- Make time at each faculty meeting to share information and reflect on the character education initiative.
- Develop brief monthly character education seminars to develop a greater understanding of guiding principles, means to integrate them into the curriculum, and ways to promote them naturally in everyday interactions with students.
- Give teachers who have developed successful strategies in character education time to share their strategies and practices with colleagues.
- Locate a funding source and write a grant to provide for summer workshops for staff development on character education.
- Find creative ways to provide time for teachers to plan how to integrate guiding principles into the curriculum.
- Develop an action plan for the year to provide a variety of strategies for staff development in character education that has the potential for reaching the entire staff.

Contemplating Character



In a school committed to character education, there is one very clear expectation...

That *everyone* will practice the guiding principles!

Goals of the Character-Centered Teaching Approach

“We believe... that the most effective way of learning skills is “in context,” placing learning objectives within a real environment rather than... in the abstract...”

Scans Report, 1991

There are ways that schools can organize their buildings, classrooms, staff, and curriculum to facilitate the learning process. A number of schools have become models in terms of developing their organizational structures to maximize learning.

Similarly, when schools decide to promote character education, the effort needs to be more organized and widespread than just signs in the hallway and occasional projects or stories about character. By making a commitment to character education and organizing the building, classrooms, staff and curriculum to integrate guiding principles, a school is facilitating the process of learning attributes and behaviors consistent with strong character.

The Character-Centered Teaching approach takes the process one step farther. It recognizes that the classroom teacher is critically important to any character education program and clearly a source of social influence in a child’s life. Therefore, when the teacher organizes him/herself to be a model and coach with regard to character, student learning is maximized. Teachers can organize themselves by:

- cultivating a learning orientation to character education
- developing a good understanding of the guiding principles and the interrelationships among the guiding principles
- learning coaching skills and practice strategies
- promoting guiding principles in a rigorous and relevant fashion
- making character education a natural part of ongoing academic instruction in the classroom.

Through these and other means, character education and academic instruction are seamlessly interwoven on a daily basis. The result is a synergistic effect in which character education enhances academic instruction and vice-versa. Essentially, rigorous and relevant quality academic instruction is presented by teachers who are continuously modeling, nurturing, and integrating guiding principles and guiding practices into their instruction. Their character guides their teaching, and their teaching is always demonstrating principles of good character.

Character-Centered Teaching



“Students learn guiding principles best in the context of real-life, interpersonal relationships.”

Martin J. Marrazo, Ph.D.

The primary goals of Character-Centered Teaching are to:

- Have students develop guiding principles and transform them into guiding practices
- Create a caring and respectful school community that promotes and supports learning academic knowledge and skills
- Promote future success of students as workers, citizens, and family members
- Establish positive expectations for responsible, caring behavior and academic achievement
- Have teachers develop skills and strategies to integrate guiding principles into academic instruction, interpersonal relationships, and the culture of the school

Transforming guiding principles
into guiding practices
is the most important goal
of the
Character-Centered Teaching approach.



VIII. Integrating Guiding Principles in the Curriculum

An Integrated Problem-based Approach to Teaching Guiding Principles

- Use a problem-based approach in which you focus a discussion on a problem that involves people, within the context of a specific academic lesson.
- Incorporate knowledge from more than one content area if possible.
- Recognize that students will offer more than one solution to the problem.
- Encourage students to work with other teachers, staff, parents, peers, or community helpers as appropriate.
- Have students assess their own skills with guiding principles and set goals accordingly.
- Incorporate skills for problem solving, decision making, logical-sequential reasoning, and creativity.
- Emphasize listening, speaking, and writing skills.
- Expect students to show guiding principles as they learn about guiding principles.
- Use activities so that a discussion of guiding principles is transformed into an active learning experience in which students can integrate guiding principles into real-life experiences and actually demonstrate guiding principles.

The Art of Integrating a Character-Centered Discussion into an Academic Lesson

Plan for the Discussion

- Prepare the academic lesson so that it is **application** oriented and involves people.
- Plan to integrate one or more **guiding principles**.
- Develop an **activity** for students to be involved in during the lesson.
- Integrate guiding principles into the **process** of teaching and learning.

Use the Socratic Method

- Start the discussion by asking which guiding principle(s) pertain to a **specific part** of the lesson.
- Use questions to **define** the guiding principle(s).
- Pose questions that are **application**-based and at higher conceptual levels.
- Ask students why the guiding principles are **important** in this situation.
- Ask students to describe how to **apply** the guiding principles in a specific role.
- Contrast guiding principles and **misguided** principles.
- Emphasize **consequences** of guiding principles and misguided principles.
- Ask students to decide if they would **act** from guiding principles or misguided principles in the specific situation in question.
- Teach **thinking skills** (contemplation) naturally as you proceed through the discussion.

Conclude the Lesson

- **Review** important aspects of the discussion near the end of the lesson.
- Ask students how they could **apply** what they learned about guiding principles to their own life.
- Have students set a **goal** to work toward within the next two days based on what they learned.
- Assign **homework** that integrates guiding principles and academic material.