SCH106: Character Education in the School-Age Child Care Environment Handout

Welcome to SCH106

This course explores the importance of character education in schools and out-of-school programs, focusing on environments for school-age children and adolescents. There are many possible approaches to character education, and no single approach is definitively better than another. Character education must involve all stakeholders in the school community to be truly effective; however, this course focuses primarily on practices and strategies for teachers, whether they are looking to supplement or improve an existing character education program or start a new one.

Objectives:

By taking notes on the handout and successfully answering assessment questions, participants will meet the following objectives as a result of taking this course:

- Identify the purpose of character education
- Recall facts related to the history and basic goals of character education in the United States
- Define *morality*
- Recognize the link between child development principles and the process of moral development
- Identify the importance of self-awareness as it relates to character education
- Identify principles of effective character education
- Differentiate between different approaches to character education
- Identify the difference between community service and service-learning
- Identify best practices for coordinating character education efforts between schools and out-of-school-time programs
- Identify recommended practices for working with parents in the context of character education

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Additional Resources

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3. Search Institute. (2015). "What Are Character Strengths?" Retrieved from https://blog.searchinstitute.org/what-are-character-strengths
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Course Notes:

Use the space provided to record important information from the course.

What is Character Education and Why is It Important?

Important Fact

The following statement from the U.S. Department of Education provides a good overview of the goal of *character education:*

A key phrase in the previous passage, _____-, is defined by Encyclopedia Britannica as *"personal qualities associated with the effective functioning of the civil and political order, or the preservation of its values and principles."*

History of Character Education in the United States

Important Note: What Character Education is *NOT*

Character Education in the OST Environment

Applying Childhood Development Principles

Everyone who works with children should be familiar with principles of child development, including:

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The ages overlap from one stage to the next, reflecting the reality that it is unwise to assume that everyone in a group is at the same stage of social-emotional development:

- Early childhood (birth to 8 years)
- School-age (also called middle childhood, ages 6 to 11 years)
- Adolescence (11-15 years)

Typical Behaviors

Most children follow a fairly typical progression in the development of social skills.
Here are some examples:

5 to 6-year-olds
- Prefer to play with friends but can play alone.
- Start to recognize, describe, and understand their feelings.
- Understand the consequences of their actions.

7 to 8-year-olds
- Can distinguish between fantasy and reality.
- Become more competitive when playing games, sports, and in school.
- Develop their sense of humor.

9 to 11-year-olds
- Look for new experiences, more risky behaviors.
- Develop a stronger individual set of values and morals, "right and wrong."
- May develop a sense of "invincibility," or lack of awareness as to the potential consequences for their decisions.

12 to 15-year-olds
- Look for additional responsibility at home and school.
- Influenced more by friends, especially when it comes to behavior, sense of self and self-esteem.
- Communicate in different ways: the internet, mobile phones, and social media can significantly influence how a child communicates with friends and learns about the world.

Moral Development

Important Fact

For individuals, _____ is defined as *"principles concerning the distinction between right and wrong or good and bad behavior."*

Foundations of Effective Character Education

Self-Awareness

Self-awareness develops:

Student Involvement and Leadership

Constant Improvement

Over time, a well-implemented character education program reaps noticeable rewards as the community of students, faculty, and families develop and evolve:

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11 Principles of Character Education from Character.org

One leading advocate and resource-provider for character education, Character.org, has outlined "11 Principles of Character Education," which provides valuable insight into how to build an effective character education program.

Principle 1: Core values are defined, implemented, and embedded into school culture.

An Example of a Traditional Philosophy Statement	An Example of a Core Value-Centered Philosophy Statement
At ABC ChildCare, we believe… • Play is the most important way in which children learn. • All children are unique individuals who learn and develop at their own rate. • Children should experience developmentally appropriate activities. • Parents are their children's first teachers and are therefore instrumental in the learning and early education process. • Dedicated and qualified teachers are necessary to provide quality education.	At ABC ChildCare,… • We are responsible, accountable, respectful, and compassionate. • We value parents and other community members as instrumental in the learning process. • Children are given the time, space, and opportunity to learn and grow at their own rate.

Principle 2: The school defines "character" comprehensively to include thinking, feeling, and doing.

	Ensure that children understand the word's definition.	Brainstorm with the children some ways to show each word with their actions.	Talk about how it would feel if people did not show these traits.	Discuss what the person should have done in the previous situation.
Responsible	*"Able to be trusted to do what is right or to do the things that are expected or required."*	Turning in assignments on time. Doing things that are expected of you.	How would it feel if someone forgot to make your lunch in the morning before school?	Make lunch the night before, and keep money in your backpack just in case.
Accountable	*"Required to be responsible for something."*	Accept the consequences for their actions. Apologize when you do something wrong.	How would it feel if your friend kicked you while they were swinging and told you it was your fault for being in the way?	They should apologize for kicking you, even if it was an accident.

		Wait your turn.		
Respectful	*"Showing or having respect (a feeling or understanding that someone or something is important, serious, etc., and should be treated in an appropriate way)."*	Raise your hand before speaking. Use words like please and thank you.	How would it feel if you were waiting in line for the slide and a classmate cut in front of you?	If there is a line to use something on the playground, they should go to the back of the line and wait their turn.
Compassionate	*"Feeling or showing concern for someone who is sick, hurt, poor, etc."*	Help a friend who fell on the playground. Hug a friend that is sad.	How would it feel if you fell and skinned your knee and a classmate just laughed at you?	They should ask if you are okay, help you up, and maybe get a teacher to help you get cleaned up.

Principle 3: The school uses a comprehensive, intentional, and proactive approach to develop character.

Questions to Ask	An Example Reflection with *Respect*
What am I currently doing to encourage _____?	*I do not respond to students unless they raise their hands and wait to be called on. I also thank students that raise their hands and wait to be called on.*
Is there anything you are unintentionally doing that contradicts _____?	*Sometimes when I am frustrated, I will raise my voice to emphasize my point.*
On a scale of 1 to 5, how well am I currently doing these practices?	*Currently, I am at a 3. I sometimes will answer questions that are blurted. Additionally, I need to work on remaining calm to avoid disrespectfully raising my voice.*
What adjustments can I make to improve this practice?	*Create a poster that says, "raise your hand and wait to be called on," to remind the students and me.*
Are there additional practices I can put in place to improve the _____ in the environment?	*Now that we are doing well with hand raising, I will shift my attention to waiting our turn by focusing on line cutting.*

Principle 4: The school creates a caring community.

Here are some ideas:

- Discuss the trait of focus at monthly staff meetings.
- Make announcements about the trait of focus and examples of the trait.
- Adults acknowledge and compliment instances of this trait.
- Send home a newsletter that explains the trait, what it looks like, and how to encourage it at home.

Principle 5: The school provides students with opportunities for moral action.

Principle 6: The school offers a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops their character, and helps them to succeed.

Principle 7: The school fosters students' self-motivation.

Consequences should be:

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_____ is a key element of self-motivation. Students should be encouraged to reflect on their core values and the degree to which their behaviors or decisions reflect those values.

Principle 8: All staff share the responsibility for developing, implementing, and modeling ethical character.

Principle 8 consists of 3 interconnected principles:

1.

2.

3.

Principle 9: The school's character initiative has shared leadership and long-range support for continuous improvement.

Principle 10: The school engages families and community as partners in the character initiative.

Principle 11: The school assesses its implementation of character education, its culture and climate, and the character growth of students on a regular basis.

Schools need to establish a process for evaluating 3 outcomes:

1.

2.

3.

Considerations for Implementing a Character Education Program

Some questions to consider:

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The Holistic Approach

Whatever specific method you adopt, this is what your holistic character education program will look like:

- The school emphasizes the development of close, positive relationships between and among students, staff, family, and community.
- There is a sense of shared values and mission in the halls and every classroom. This is reflected in everything from how community members communicate and collaborate to the signs and décor on the walls.
- The schoolwide curriculum focuses as much on social and emotional learning as it does on academics. This in no way reduces the emphasis on academic achievement; rather, social-emotional learning promotes higher achievement as students learn to cope with adversity, persevere, and learn from each other.
- Cooperation and collaboration are emphasized over competition. Individuals or groups can still be recognized for excellence and high achievement, whether in academics or sports, but shared responsibility and achievement are valued above all.
- Values such as fairness, respect, and honesty are incorporated into everyday lessons, not only in the classroom but in all aspects of the environment, from the time they enter the building to the time they leave.
- Students have abundant opportunities to practice moral behavior through real-world problem-solving and service.
- Learning is more student-centered than teacher-centered.
- Classroom management and guidance practices focus on problem-solving rather than rewards and punishments.
- Classrooms reflect everything you find in the Caring Community approach.

The Caring Community Approach

If you want to build a "caring community" in your classroom, but you do not have much freedom to alter the overall curriculum to match what we find in a holistic program, you can focus on the following:

- Foster close teacher-student and student-student social bonds.
- Hold class meetings in which students establish group goals, decide on rules of conduct, plan activities, and solve problems. Encourage participation by all students. This does not mean every student should be forced to speak during the class meeting whether they want to or not, but everyone should have a chance, and every voice deserves respect.
- Invite students to collaborate on academic tasks by working in cooperative learning groups whenever possible. Mix the groups regularly to encourage students to work with various personalities and abilities.
- Give students regular opportunities to plan how best to work together, reflect on their experiences, and figure out ways to work better.
- Organize a buddy system program in which younger and older students get together to work one-on-one on academic tasks and other kinds of activities. This can be done in partnership with another teacher, but it is even easier in an OST program where there is often a range of ages.
- Teach and model conflict resolution and other social skills that emphasize fairness and peaceful resolution.

The Values Curriculum

To add character-building to your literary discussions, ***reach outside the story itself and ask questions that encourage students to analyze a character and make judgments based on their values:***

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You can take a similar approach in history or social studies classes. ***The real value in learning history comes in analyzing and debating the decisions and actions of historical figures and communities,*** not just learning what they did and when they did it.

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Science class provides fertile ground for the exploration of ethical issues. While there is little room for debate regarding the laws of physics or the chemical properties of various substances, ***the pursuit and application of scientific knowledge is often fraught with ethical quandaries.***

Consider:

- Genetic testing
- The use of animals in research
- Stem cells and cloning
- Genetic modification of crops
- Artificial intelligence

These are a few examples of ethical issues the scientific community and society must grapple with. There are no easy answers, and right/wrong is often a matter of perspective. Nevertheless, there are valid arguments on both sides of most scientific dilemmas. While students cannot be expected to resolve such dilemmas, the exercise is still worthwhile for building awareness of one's core values and the complexities of the world in which we live.

Similarly, ***economics provides lots of opportunities for ethics debates.***

What are the pros and cons of industrialization? What are the positives and negatives of a consumer-based economy like we have in the United States? Cost-benefit analysis is often a good way to encourage students to reflect on their values.

Insist on Respect

There is more to respect than simply being polite while others speak (although that is certainly important). Respect involves the understanding that:

- Everyone makes mistakes.
- It is not okay to insult or tease other people.
- Everyone has different strengths and weaknesses.
- Everyone's opinion is valuable, even if you do not agree.
- It is disrespectful to talk negatively about others behind their backs.
- It is always important to show gratitude when others offer help, even if you did not ask or do not want it.
- It is not okay to judge people based on their abilities, beliefs, race, gender, or ethnicity.
- It is not okay to pressure others into doing something they do not want to do.
- It is important to be sensitive to other people's feelings.
- It is important to keep your promises. Do what you say you will do; if it turns out you cannot do it, do not be afraid to admit it. That is a sign of respect for yourself and others.

Focus on Community Service and Service Learning

Community Service vs. Service-Learning

Community service is defined:

Community service can come in many forms but could include:

- Helping those in financial need (food banks, Habitat for Humanity projects, gathering or delivering holiday presents for needy families).
- Picking up litter in the park.
- Packing boxes for soldiers overseas.
- Tutoring or mentoring.
- Coaching.
- Visiting, talking, playing games with the elderly or infirmed.
- Organizing a fundraiser for a worthy charity.

What is service-learning?

According to the National Youth Leadership Council,

> "An approach to teaching and learning in which students use academic and civic knowledge and skills to address genuine community needs."

Partnering with Schools, Families, and Community Organizations

According to the National AfterSchool Association, successful afterschool programming depends on building partnerships with families, schools, and communities that are built upon:

- Ongoing, two-way communication.
- A commitment to confidentiality.
- Connecting families to community resources.
- Participation at age-appropriate community service activities.

Coordination Between OST Programs and Schools

The 6 Pillars of Character from Character Counts	School-Based Program	"8 Keys of Excellence" Character Education Program
Trustworthiness Respect Responsibility Fairness Caring Citizenship	Self-control Accountable Dependable Pursuit of Excellence Diligence Perseverance Service	Integrity Failure Leads to Success Speak with Good Purpose This Is It! (make the most of every moment) Commitment Ownership Flexibility Balance

Partnering with Families

The following proactive policies and practices will help families understand their role and responsibility with regard to character education.

- Make it clear that families are welcome to come in and discuss any questions or concerns they may have in relation to the character education program. Ideas and feedback are welcome, and so is criticism. Let them know at the outset that your program focuses on problem-solving skills and conflict resolution, not just with students but also in family-teacher relations. Most problems can be solved when approached with mutual respect.
- Provide a **written overview of the character development program** that is shared at the time of enrollment. Explain the program goals and the roles/expectations for staff, families, and students in clear terms.
- Provide a detailed overview of your **guidance and discipline policy**.
- It is a good idea to offer a written **Code of Conduct Agreement** for staff, students, and families to read, discuss, and sign. The code should reflect the character values emphasized within the program, thus establishing expectations and providing a tangible reference point for any future conflicts.
- Extend an **open invitation** for families to join the program as their schedules allow. This is important as it allows families to observe their children in different environments, listen for words that are used to redirect children, and ask questions that they might have about various aspects of the program.
- Be sure families know how to **schedule an appointment** to discuss their child's development and behaviors in the program and any concerns they might have.
- **Model strong character traits** for families in all your interactions. Apologize when you make mistakes, keep confidences (unless it involves mandated reporting requirements), and be open to learning together.

Community Partnerships

What Can Community Resources Do for You?

Some community resources afterschool programs often connect with include:

- Local and State Government officials.
- Neighborhood businesses and professionals.
- Members from the chamber of commerce or service organization (e.g., Rotary).
- Volunteers of all ages to assist in tutoring, facilitating activities, or giving presentations.
- State resources for health and family support.
- Local community parks and recreation agencies.
- Local nonprofits and charitable organizations.

Regarding community involvement, the [Core Knowledge and Competencies of the National Afterschool Association](#) state that program staff should develop the following competencies:

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SCH106: Character Education in the School-Age Child Care Environment
Try This! Activities

Try This!

Family Involvement Ideas

Here are more ideas to get families involved in the program.

- Host a weekly class discussion in which children name one task they will help their families complete during the weekend (e.g., help a sibling or grandparent, no complaining, clean room, do chores, be nice to sibling, use words to express feelings). Children can put their ideas in writing and share them with their families at pickup time. There are no negative consequences or positive rewards. The activity is simply an exercise in following through on commitments.
- Include take-home activity ideas in the monthly newsletter that relate to the theme-based activities completed during the program. For example, provide a list of words (happy, conflict, rules, generous, trust) for families to discuss.
- Provide families the opportunity to receive and recognize acts of kindness or "doing the right thing" to increase involvement. Adults like recognition too!
- Cosponsor with the school or PTO a session for families and other family members on the importance of social and emotional development.
- Help families understand and support the school's discipline policy and know how it fits into the overall character effort.
- Provide a family lending library with books, movies, and articles that families can use to reinforce character building with their families. Add a character section in your monthly newsletter with links and update information for reference.

Additional Activities and Practices that Support Character Education

This section provides some activities and strategies OST providers can use to reinforce key character-building concepts.

Try This!

What Would You Do?

Challenge children to discuss what they would do when faced with ethical dilemmas. It helps to think about these things before they happen. Be sure to discuss the consequences of various decisions.

Examples:

- You arrived at school and found a $5 bill in the hallway. What would you do?
- You did not do your homework last night, and it is due. What would you do?
- You see a new kid in the program sitting alone. What would you do?
- Your best friend is bullying someone. What would you do?

Try This!

Reflect on It

Reflection is not a game; it is just a good habit. It is never too late to learn from history, which applies to character education. It is important that children feel like there is a safe space to bring up things troubling them, whether it is something that happened with a peer or something they heard about on the news.

The OST environment may be just the place for such conversation. Opportunities to discuss examples of good citizenship, decision-making, bullying, and exclusion are easy to find daily. It is also important for adults to share their concerns with children when appropriate.

Try This!

Build Awareness

Use words and vocabulary to define character traits, emotions, and values. Ask questions that give children a chance to show their prior knowledge of character development during group times, while eating a snack, or during other informal conversations.

Try This!

On the Wall and Around the Room

- Create a "Wall of Character" board to recognize children's achievements for character-building goals, such as mentoring others or participating in a community service project or service-learning project.
- Post quotes around the room relating to character traits or behaviors as prompts for journal writing.
- Encourage children to research newspapers or magazine articles about ethical or moral issues. Read and discuss articles in large or small groups.
- Provide children with a pre-determined symbol (star, hand, peace symbol) to acknowledge a character-building behavior when exhibited. Display the symbols in a designated place of the program and share them with families and others who visit.
- Provide a character development Activity Idea Box. Ask children to write ideas for activities and place them in the box. Draw or vote on which activity to focus on that week and invite the child who wrote the idea to facilitate the activity with the group.
- When ordering new games or books for the program, look for those that promote character development.

Try This!

Read, Play, Learn

There are lots of books and activities available to reinforce character-building themes. Here are a few good links, but you will not have trouble finding more if you search. Make these freely available in the OST environment.

For books:

- "Recommended Reading: Books to Build Character & Teach Your Child Important Values"
- "Powerful Character Education Books for Teaching Children Values"
- "100 Books Under $10 That Build Character"

Try This!

Conflict Resolution Activities

Do not wait for conflict to occur to give children the chance to try out some of these activities proactively:

- Have children share their conflict resolution methods and ideas with the larger group. Encourage the group to discuss whether they think each will be an effective approach, why or why not, and how it might be improved.
- Set a "NO UNRESOLVED CONFLICT" goal for the program each week. Recognize and celebrate progress and successes.
- Develop a peer mediation program. (**Note:** This requires specialized training for teachers and students but can be very effective in the right environment.)

Try This!

More Community Involvement and Service Ideas

- Host a book or toy drive and donate to a local children's charity of their choosing.
- If licensing, center management, and schools allow, add a class pet such as a fish or hermit crab for children to care for and be responsible for.
- Participate in planting and caring for a community garden, a great way to meet interesting people and learn about nature and the value of hard work and shared knowledge.
- Set up a pen-pal program with another afterschool program.
- Improve the physical environment in or around the school: pick up trash, paint a mural, help with landscaping.

Try This!

Diversity Discussion

Invite children to interpret the following sayings about diversity and facilitate a discussion. This can spark a rich discussion about the nature of diversity and how we respond to it.

- Do to others what you would want others to do to you.
- A leopard cannot change its spots.
- Beauty is in the eye of the beholder.