

Character education is an idea filled with much opinion and personal belief. As an educator, you want to be mindful of all the students in your class and their personal beliefs towards character and one's attitude. No teacher ever wants their student to feel judgement in a place where they must feel the liberty of learning to carry on with the best outlook of life. Educators have the burden of finding the best way to teach moral character with great depth; yet still allowing students to feel the freedom of belief. We all deserve to have our credence honored, especially in a public-school setting. How can we honor the credibility of religions and teach character without mentioning God? How can we show our students that there is still acceptance in spite of the way we choose to teach morality?

In order to successfully teach character, we have to know what character is. Hunter describes character as the story we are all living out for a purpose that is great than ourselves (Hunter, 2000). They are the things that find a way to be embedded within us. They are our passions, our reflections, our hope, our love, and our trust. I like to think of character is the part of us that always intends to do well. It's the very part of our being that is beyond capable of making good choices decisions that help to not only help us, but positively affect those who are around as well. To teach the beauty of character, you must believe in the beauty of character. You must believe that there is a hope for mankind in spite of the choices people make daily, and you have to decide that what you say can make a difference in spite of what your students decide. We have to know what makes character important and we have to believe in the truth of it.

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As an educator, you always want to give your student the very best, after all they are a reflection of you and all that you have instilled in them. We want our students to be kind, we want them to think of others. Haynes claims that schools should be the laboratories for acts of conscience (Haynes, 2009). I must say that I couldn't agree more. The classroom can be the one place where your students feel safe, free and harmony. Our approach to character education can either make our students desire good character, or be discouraged before they even get into the pursuit of morality.

Whenever we are approached with an idea that is new, an idea we are unsure of, the first thing we feel is fear. If we are going to teach good character, we must effectively demolish the idea of the fear to fail, the fear to disappoint, and the fear of never becoming. We have to let our students know the truth and the first truth remains that no one is perfect. You will make mistakes and there are days that you won't make a decision you are proud of, but if you decide to allow that to define you, it will. If you decide to be more than your mistakes, you will have good character. Teaching students to be upright is beneficial, but if we teach them to embrace their mistakes as they are also part of them, then they can take on the moral compass in a different aspect. We have to leave room for that part of human exploration. They have to explore who they are and who they want to be, and they must do it by being and evaluating themselves in a way they will have to face those unpleasant pieces of their character. We cannot give up on our students when they don't make the choices, we thought they would make, we have to let them know we are still proud of them regardless of what they decide.

Once the students have established the truth about character, I believe then it is important for them to decide what makes good character and what are the characteristics that one should have if they do have good character. Have students write it out in a sheet of paper and discuss it

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within a safe classroom setting. Lickona discusses the importance of allowing students to be fully involved in their growth (Lickona, 2004). Whenever we are teaching students a lesson, one of the main components always happens to be student engagement. We want our students to be fully coupled with what we are teaching. We never desire to teach and it goes over our students' head. We have to engage them in discussion of character the same way we do when we are discussing any other subject. We have to find out what would be the best way to reach them as if we were teaching any other subject. With this perspective of engagement, we also must allow students to take responsibility for their learning. If they want to be great, they are required to do great on their own.

After the students decide what the important pieces of character are, we then add things to their list and introduce different books, movies and shows that deal with character and are grade level appropriate. After every book, or series of shows, have the students write about the characters and how they felt when people were mistreated. They also must discuss how the situation can be defused. I also believe in participating in class activities that allow students see how they may be different and how they can share similarities with people in their classroom. One activity I plan on having in my classroom would be called "I mess up too" the students will each get an index card. On one side of the card, the students would write about a time someone did something to hurt their feelings, and on the other side they would write about a time they hurt someone else's feelings. Students are not required to share and all cards handed in are anonymous. This exercise is one that can help students realize that no one is perfect. It shows them that at any moment they can be a victim of a person, and they can also victimize. It shows them self-awareness and awareness of others and thinking about how others may feel.

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Teaching character education is not a thing that can be done overnight, character takes time, sometimes beyond a lifetime. You can never really ever stop working on being a person of good character. If we can teach students the foundation of it, then they would be able to use it in spite of where they are in their life. We aren't teaching them for the classroom, we have to teach them success for the society in which they live and the community in which they effect. There is not proper way to teach character and moral education, but if we can change the approach then maybe the affects would be able to last beyond their school years.

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References

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