

# Implementing Character Education in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Curriculum

Yoojin Kwon\*

Instructor, Dept. of Home Economics, Graduate School, Chung-Ang University, Korea

**Abstract:** Character education is an opportunity for students to develop character through teaching values in schools. In the past, students have been taught values at home but contemporary society has strongly encouraged the public schools to provide time for children to learn values because society is facing a crisis of human values that affects the behavior of individuals. According to research findings, the primary benefit of character education is to develop the intellectual, personal, and social aspects of students. However, there are some problems concerning how to teach values and how to evaluate student outcomes in public schools. This article explores the current character education in the U. S. through a review of the literature in order to reach a better understanding of how character education might be included in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum.

**Key Words :** character education, character development, family and consumer sciences education curriculum

## I. Introduction

“Character is like a tree and reputation like its shadow. The shadow is what we think of it; the tree is the real thing (Abraham Lincoln, 1809-1865).”

Developing student character is a current issue in education because the immature character of students results in some negative behaviors at schools. The survey of *Joseph & Edna Josephson Institute of Ethics (2000, 2001)*, targeting 8,600 ninth-through twelfth-grade students, revealed that seven out of ten respondents cheated on tests at least once in the past year, ninety-two percent of the students lied to their parents at home, and seventy-eight percent lied to teachers at school. Sixty-eight percent of the respondents used violence when they were angry. The 2001 survey reported that 15,000 teens (more than one third of the respondents) did not feel safe at school, sixty percent of those in high school could get a gun, and sixty-nine

percent could get drugs if they wanted (Finck, Hansen, & Jensen, 2003). These statistics reveal that school environments have become at-risk.

Since the 1990s, the U. S. school curriculum has included character education to develop the character of students in all tiers of education elementary, secondary, and higher education. Current educators and researchers believe that the negative behaviors of students such as cheating, lying, using violence, guns, and drugs, originate from a lack of character development through the learning process. For example, Delisio (2000) suggests that character education can contribute to a reduce violence and negative behaviors in communities as well as in public schools. Davidson and Stokes (2001) reported on the perceptions of character education by teachers. The study revealed teachers have a strongly positive perception to teaching character education on all levels, but vocational teachers have the most positive perception in regards to character education. Narvaez

---

\*Corresponding Author: Yoojin Kwon, Kyunggi-Do, Goyang-City, Janghang-Dong 751 Samsung Lacville 343, Korea  
Tel: +82-2-3485-5344 Fax: +82-2-3485-5399 E-mail: yjinkwon@hanmail.net

(2001) discusses that character education should be incorporated into a curriculum rather than added as extra programs because values, or character, are strongly related to daily lives across the curriculum rather than limited to particular classes.

Sewell and Hall (2003) reported that the majority of the family and consumer sciences education teachers (86.6%) felt character education is needed by students, and 75.8% of the teachers thought that character education can be incorporated into the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum. Additionally, 64.9% of them recognized that character education should be included in the curriculum. Even though the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum of some states in the U. S. have accepted character education programs as moral education or value education, each content area curriculum need more efforts to integrate character education into the general curriculum of the Family and Consumer Sciences Education. Furthermore, character education also supports the development of individual disposition or traits needed as family and community members. The purpose of this article is to expand the understanding of historical perspective and the status of character education in the U. S., and to suggest some implications for the Family and Consumer Sciences Educators to integrate character education into the curriculum.

## **II. Background of the Study**

### **1. Definitions of Character Education**

Character exists in society and character can be taught by schools, named as moral education or value education (Narvaez, 2001; Sewell & Hall, 2003). One view of character education as an umbrella term is to be interchangeable with moral development, moral education, violence prevention, and conflict resolution (Otten, 2000). Another understanding of character education can be different. While moral education focuses on moral

values as human beings, character education focuses on ethical values as citizens. In contemporary society, the latter view can be acceptable regardless of religion and society.

Delisio (2000) explains character is behaviors that include honesty, respect, tolerance, cooperation or responsibility. Another researcher notes the definition of character as attitudes or beliefs influencing the behaviors of individuals related to the self and to others (Bulach, 2002). Bulach (2002) provides two different features of character; observable character (e.g. sportsmanship, generosity, courtesy, and empathy) and non-observable character (e.g. persistence, motivation, self-respect, and self-control). Bulach (2002) studied the attitudes and values of character targeting teachers, parents, and clergy in Atlanta, Georgia. The respondents of teachers and parents reported that the most important character traits were respect to self and others, honesty, and self-control, while the least important character traits were humility, generosity, and sportsmanship.

Sewell and Hall (2003) reported that the Family and Consumer Sciences Education teachers perceived concepts of character in the curriculum (1: not perceived a concept to 4: major concept), including 1) respect for others (M = 3.84), 2) cooperation (M = 3.81), 3) courtesy (M = 3.74), 4) punctuality (M = 3.72), 5) self-respect (M = 3.72), 6) self-control (M = 3.71), 7) honesty (M = 3.70), 8) cleanliness (M = 3.68), 9) kindness (M = 3.65), and 10) fairness (M = 3.62). The results showed that the ten characters were very important concepts (M > 3.6) in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum.

Even though educators and researchers generally agreed to the several definitions of character, understanding of character education is dependent upon the different views on education. Otten (2000) discusses that the purpose of character education is to teach values in order to develop the character of students. The study presents that character education is defined as an inclusive education based on character development. Another view is that character education emphasizes the development of inter- or intra-related skills regarding ethical values

rather than dispositional traits (Narvaez, 2001). Both views can be accepted to make a rationale for incorporating character education into the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum at school. Reviewing the historical perspectives contributes to a better understanding of character education.

## **2. Historical Perspectives**

The term ‘character education’ has been used for two decades, but its origin of teaching values and morality came from Ancient Greece (Algera & Sink, 2002). Many philosophers taught values through thinking of self, others, and society. Actually, that thinking and discussion established Greek philosophy, and character education could be understood by the philosophical perspectives (i.e. what is goodness?). From the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries, the Bible was used as an educational textbook in order to teach children values. During those periods, character or moral education was guided by church members or ministers.

Finck and colleagues (2003) discuss that character education had declined due to the change of school, family, and the society. There have been so many changes in contemporary society. The school-related changes have been due to diverse school population, diversity in student backgrounds, different social and economic status, and cultural differences. The family-related changes have been related to the home environment, changes that have increased due to the number of single parents, divorces, grandparents raising children, and an increase of violence in the media and on the Internet. Due to the changing patterns in the family, the role of teaching values and developing character has been shifted from the family to the public schools. After the shift of a teaching role, many different terminologies have been used, including value education, moral education, and value clarification.

At that time, character education started to be defined with the psychological perspectives as well as the philosophical perspectives (Narvaez, 2001). Moral

development by Kohlberg and reflective thinking by John Dewey have been emphasized in education in the U. S. in the 1970s through 1980s (Algera & Sink, 2002). The psychological perspectives are more related to human needs in daily lives (i.e. how well functioning?). Even though the public schools have been teaching character and values for students, diversity of families, life environments, cultures, and societies made it hard to come to agreement about what would be considered common values or morality in public schools. This is the reason for the integration of the psychological and the philosophical perspectives into the theoretical framework of character education. Beyond teaching common values to students, character education contributes to develop the character and civic values of students that develop several skills for being better citizens.

In the early 1990s, elementary schools only included character education into the curricula focusing on moral development or character development for young children (Williams, Yanchar, Jensen, & Lewis, 2003). Character education was spread with the concept of moral value, social justice, and virtues of society in the late 1990s. Since the end of the 1990s, more secondary public schools have paid attention to character education because of the increase of irresponsible and anti-social behavior in youth. The current character education is effective in reducing the negative behavior of students and teaching the ethical skills needed as citizens.

## **III. Character Education in the U. S.**

### **1. Current Status of Character Education**

President Bush decided to spend more money (nine to twenty five million dollars) for character education in order to meet moral character needs at schools (Finck, Hansen, & Jensen, 2003). The states of Wisconsin, Hawaii, New York, Oregon, Colorado, Indiana, Minnesota, Iowa, Alaska, and Ohio received the grants for character

education from the Federal Government, and then in 2000, the states of the District of Columbia, Idaho, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Nebraska, Rhode Island, Tennessee, and Virginia received the grants as well. The thirty states in the U. S. have been funded by the U. S. Department of Education as state grants for character education, and the sixteen states have legislations related in character education (Otten, 2000).

Since the 1990s, character education has been one of the educational issues in the U. S. For instance, Delisio (2000) discussed that the New Jersey State legislators accepted 4.75 million dollars to support character education for all graders in New Jersey. Since 1995, the state of Utah has paid for professional development to help character education, and in 2000, the legislature funded 400,000 dollars for the local efforts of character education. The state of Washington reported the positive changes of student behavior after receiving and applying federal funding for character education. It was said that character education programs contributed to the decrease of sexual harassment and the negative behavior among the elementary school students. Additionally, the Georgia State legislature in 1999 provided federal grants (one million dollars) for character education at public schools and mandated teaching values.

There are sample programs in the U. S. including *Character Counts*, *Giraffe Project*, and *Character Education Partnership* (Otten, 2000). The *Character Counts* program is a voluntary partnership that supports character education nationwide. *Character Counts* represents six pillars of character that include respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, caring, fairness, and citizenship. The *Giraffe Project* is a program that provides examples of heroes for the care and concern of others and the local community. The *Character Education Partnership* is a national nonprofit coalition in existence since 1993 in order to “encourage leaders of national education associations to give greater attention and priority to character education.” Other character education programs are *Building Esteem in Students Today*, *Character Development Program*, and *Community Caring*. Other class techniques in character

education are peer mediation as a voluntary process and mentoring (Finck, Hansen, & Jensen, 2003). As mentioned above, financial funding and diverse programs related to character education have supported teachers and public schools to teach values to students.

## 2. Research on Character Education

Another study of Davidson and Stokes (2001) in North Alabama collected data from 39 administrators and 210 teachers working at elementary and secondary schools. The survey revealed that teachers have a positive perception regarding character education. Business vocational teachers have a more positive perception than core courses or academic area teachers. Administrators have a more positive perception regarding character education than teachers, and more high school administrators than elementary administrators believed that character education reduces sexual harassment in public schools. Conclusively, the positive attitudes of the respondents supported character education in public schools.

Research regarding effectiveness of character education is recently increasing as well. Heavey, Meyers, Mozdren and Warneke (2002) studied elementary student awareness of respect and responsibility. They measured student recognition through the pre-survey and the post-survey data from teachers, parents, and peer-observation. The service projects were related to help community children's hospitals. The research revealed a dramatic decrease of negative behavior by students through the service projects: for example, they were talking at inappropriate times, disrespecting the poverty of others, not keeping their hands to themselves, and objecting the self and others. The first graders reduced negative behavior from 73% to 11%, the fourth graders reduced from 82% to 13%, and the sixth graders went from 81% to 32%. The study supports the positive effect of character education that is the reduction of negative behavior by all-age students.

### 3. Family and Consumer Sciences Education and Character Education

Since the last decade, the Family and Consumer Sciences Education teachers have been more interested in the inclusion of character education into the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum. Research of Sewell and Hall (2003) examined perceptions of the Family and Consumer Sciences Education teachers regarding character education in 2001. The three hundred teachers in Georgia participating in the service meeting were selected as the sample population. The respondents were all high school teachers and the average year of teaching experience was 14.5 years. The result indicated the Family and Consumer Sciences Education teachers believed that the most important character traits were 'respect for others' and 'cooperation', while the least important character traits were 'patriotism' and 'courage'. The majority of respondents (64.9%) thought character education should be included in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum. The teachers reported that they already integrated character education into classes, such as Nutrition Wellness (58.5%), Parenting (58.5%), Career, Community and Family Connections (55.9%), and Family (48.2%). The research reported that teachers recognized the Family and Consumer Sciences Education as a good subject to teach character and values for students because the content of the Family and Consumer Sciences Education are based on real life problems and issues of decision making.

According to the National Standards for the Family and Consumer Sciences Education, a certain possibility of integration of character education can be found in the specific content standards, including *Career, Community, and Family Connections, Early Childhood, Education, and Services, and Family, Parenting, and Interpersonal Relationships*. The standards for Career, Community, and Family Connections demonstrate that the Family and Consumer Sciences Education curriculum includes responsibilities and participation in the community. Participation in community activities can include the

meaning of citizenship. The standards for Early Childhood, Education, and Service as well as Parenting explain that the curriculum includes responsibility for parents, understanding of children, and positive relationships with children; it is related to concept of caring as one of the six pillars of character education (Character Counter). The standards of family include the concept of respect toward diversity in family units. The standards of Interpersonal Relationships show that the curriculum can include the concepts of respect, caring, and trust related to relationships. The Interpersonal Relationships standards show that the curriculum includes diverse skills and techniques for respectful and caring relationships with others. The National Standards of the Family and Consumer Sciences Education show that curriculum is connected to character education.

### IV. Criticism of Character Education

A criticism of character education that Otten (2000) discussed was the question of whose values should be taught in public schools. Additionally, it was suggested that educators consider how to manage the conflict between school and family values. This point is very critical of the public schools due to aspects of fairness and justice. Another problem of character education is how to teach values or how to develop invisible character traits, and how to measure student outcomes in the current school setting. With a focus on fairness and objective measurement of student outcomes, teacher or parent observation, and pen-and-pencil test for knowledge of specific character values might seem like a good ways to evaluate student outcomes. However, students have different needs and different backgrounds even though students attend at the same school. Teacher and parent awareness of individual character development can be difficult. Especially, single parents or low income families have less time to observe the character development of children. As a result, teachers are more likely to depend on the measurement of

knowledge in specific character traits.

Many schools have character development programs that include community service or volunteer work during the school year. However, Davis (2003) discusses the mistake of making character education a mandatory aspect in these programs. Even though character education can be accomplished through real experiences in working with community, the study mentions good character can be developed by volunteering in service projects, rather than making it a requirement to participate in community service. The challenges of character education are related to measuring student outcomes and putting into practice character education programs that include community activities. In order to integrate character education into the curriculum, increased efforts by educators, administrators, and parents are needed for the practice of character education.

## **V. Implications for Integration into the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Curriculum**

Williams and colleague (2003) suggest that the current high school curriculum with experiential experiences can be good for character education, rather than the development of new models for character education. The reason is that character is developed and revealed by exposure to and the practice of real life experiences. The rationale for character education is well suited to the purpose of the Family and Consumer Sciences Education where the purposes are related to provide opportunities for learning and applying practical knowledge and skills related to real life in order to improve the quality of lives. Especially, Family and Consumer Sciences programs (including food and nutrition, child development, family studies, and consumer economics) need to integrate ethics or character into the programs. The reason is ethics or character can lead student actions when encountering dilemmas (Hira, 1996). Inclusion of this into the current curriculum can be a good solution; for example, experiential

learning such as apprentice programs and internships. The Family and Consumer Sciences Education would implement real world-based learning such as fieldtrips or internships in the curriculum using experiential learning methods.

Applying various techniques and lesson projects such as reflective journals, role playing, novels, and class cooperation contributes to improve integration of character education into the curriculum as well. For high schools, character education can be accomplished through the development of character programs in each subject matter. Another way to develop character in the public school is to integrate several classes together for character education. Teachers and administrators are instructed in character education as well.

For researchers in South Korea, they need to be sensitive to the impact of school-related changes and family-related change (home environment). Researchers for the Family and Consumer Sciences Education would develop and determine items of character that match South Korea such as respect for others, cooperation, self-respect, self-control, and kindness. The character programs in South Korea need to support ethical or value development and individual dispositional trait development in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education. For Family and Consumer Sciences teachers in South Korea, they need to practice character development through professional development or other opportunities to provide a role model for the character development of students.

## **References**

- Algera, H. F. & Sink, C. A. (2002). Another Look at Character Education in Christian Schools. *The Journal of Research on Christian Education*, 11(2), 161-181.
- Bulach, C. R. (2002). Implementing a Character Education Curriculum and Assessing its Impact on Student Behavior. *The Clear House*, 76(2), 79-83.
- Davidson, L. & Stokes, L. C. (2001). *Educators' Perceptions of Character Education*. Presented at the Mid-South

- Educational Research Association Regional Meeting, Alabama.
- Davis, M. (2003). What's Wrong with Character Education? *American Journal of Education*, 32-57.
- Delisio, E. R. (2000). *Character Education Getting a Boost*. Retrieved December 14, 2004, from [http://www.educationworld.com/a\\_curr/curr282.shtml](http://www.educationworld.com/a_curr/curr282.shtml)
- Finck, C., Hansen, C., & Jensen, J. (2003). Improving Student Achievement through Character Education. *Dissertation of Master of Arts in teaching and leadership*. Saint Xavier University, U.S.A.
- Heavey, J., Meyers, M., Mozdren, C., & Warneke, T. (2002). Developing Character Education through the Use of Current Curriculum. *Dissertation of Master of Arts in teaching and leadership*. Saint Xavier University, U.S.A.
- Hira, T. K. (1996). Ethics: personal and professional implications. *Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences*, 6-9.
- Narvaez, D. (2001). *Who Should I Become? Using the Positive and the Negative in Character Education*. 2001 American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Seattle.
- Otten, E. H. (2000). *Character Education*. Retrieved December 14, 2004, from <http://www.ericfacility.net/ericdigests/ed444932.html>
- Sewell, D. T. & Hall, H. C. (2003). Teachers' Attitudes toward Character Education and Inclusion in the Family and Consumer Sciences Education Curriculum. *The Journal of Family and Consumer Sciences Education*, 21(1), 11-17.
- Williams, D. D., Yanchar, S. C., Jensen, L. C., & Lewis, C. (2003). Character Education in a Public High School: A Multi-year Inquiry into Unified Studies. *The Journal of Moral Education*, 32(1), 3-33.

---

Received December 23, 2007

Revised April 21, 2008

Accepted April 28, 2008