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The Evolution of Character Education: From Hellfire and Brimstone to Constructivism

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**The Evolution of Character Education:
From Hellfire and Brimstone to Constructivism**

December 1, 1997

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I. Introduction

Since colonial times, character education has played a kaleidoscopic role in American schools. Seventeenth and eighteenth century Puritan curriculum was synonymous with an exceedingly rigid and religious moral code. Nineteenth century policy makers adopted a Pan-Protestant, and then a generalized Christian philosophy of character education, as they pursued a common school system. As twentieth century American society grew increasingly pluralistic, the religious basis of character education succumbed to a more secular framework. Predictably, this century has seen character education be demoted to just one of many competing items on the national education agenda. Paradoxically, today's violence-filled headlines evince a more desperate need than ever for character education in public schools. At the same time, America is more pluralistic than it has ever been. Consequently, the task of deciding whose values to teach, and how to best teach them, is most treacherous.

A starting place for this task may be an examination of the three domains of character education: moral, political, and intellectual. This paper will explore the "essential tensions" that have historically defined these three domains. A discussion of these domains in light of current policy and practice will follow. Finally, the author will analyze constructivist service-learning, which, in the author's experience, is the character education model that best maximizes each domain and thoroughly acknowledges the desperation and pluralism of current American society.

II. The Roots of Character Education

Character education has been defined as the intentional, proactive effort to develop good character (Lickona, 1997). Virtues such as the ancient Greek qualities of temperance and justice are the building blocks of character. Lickona (1997) states that people need to embrace virtue and develop character in order to be fully human. He declares that schools, with their rich human relationships and centrality in communities, comprise a natural context in which to practice character education. Former Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders takes a stronger stand, stating that the schools must teach character because "they are the last institution we have that all the children go to" (Elders, as cited in Fisher, 1995a). While most Americans would probably acknowledge the need for character education, our pluralistic society prohibits us from finding a common framework for teaching virtues.

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Since colonial times, Americans have juggled the moral, political, and intellectual domains of character education.

Moral Domain

For several reasons, the moral domain is perhaps the most controversial of the three domains of character education. Morals refer to how people identify, feel about, and exhibit virtues. In other words, the moral domain asks the question: How can one become a good person? This simple question revealed many tensions, among them:

- Objectivism vs. relativism
- Local rule vs. universal rule
- Sectarianism vs. secularism
- Assimilation of diverse populations vs. accommodation of diverse populations

Some examples from history will help elaborate on the development of these tensions. In the eighteenth century, Puritan religious ideals of repentance and discipline dictated primary education. Schools were vehicles that replicated the existing religious patterns. Students were awed by Puritan virtues, many of which instilled fear. For example, the poem *The Day of the Doom* must have terrified youngsters with its images of sinning and hell. During this formative period of American education, New England children exhibited virtues by working hard, being disciplined in all aspects of life, and living life by the Puritan interpretation of the Bible. In short, Bible-based morals were treated as objective and universal truths.

However, as American society changed, so did its view on what a "good person" was. The Enlightenment, the influence of child-centered European educators, the push for common schools, and the increasing ethnic and religious diversity of America spawned the seeds of moral relativism that did not exist earlier. Although moral education was still the most important task of the common school, and despite the assumption that moral education still required the sanction of religion, a broader Pan-Protestant view of character education emerged in the 1800s. The words of Brooklyn's Superintendent (Superintendent of Common Schools, as cited in Kaestle, 1984, p. 103) exemplified this view when he listed these non-denominational doctrines for his district: 'That there is one God; that we are His creatures, dependent on Him for our mercies, and accountable to Him for our conduct; that we are sinners and need a Savior; and that One "mighty to save" has been provided.' By adopting this stance, educators were attempting to assimilate and unify a diverse society.

However, accepting Pan-Protestantism was difficult for many Americans. Catholics, Norwegian Lutherans, and orthodox Congregationalists longed for their own schools. They wanted to be accommodated, not assimilated into a mainstream moral culture. Frederick Packard of Philadelphia eschewed the idea of universal rule on character education, declaring that local majority rule should determine the religious content of moral education in public school.

As these disputes emerged, so did a more secular stance on the definition of a "good person." The McGuffey Readers, which advocated "natural", middle-class virtues such as honesty and kindness, became best-sellers: over 122 million copies were sold after 1836. Books with more secular content were added to libraries, inciting a range of reactions from the public. As America has become even more pluralistic, the battle over determining what a "good person" is has become even more complex. Parts III and IV of this paper will explore how American policy and practice are presently dealing with this dilemma.

Political Domain

The political domain of character education emerged from nineteenth century industry and capitalism. Religious, political, and economic ideas of morality began overlapping and becoming mutually reinforcing. As the need for cooperative societal and economic systems emerged, conventional wisdom pursued the question: What is a good citizen? This question revealed the following tensions:

- Permissiveness vs. utilitarianism
- Platitudes vs. problem-solving
- Altruism vs. systematic reform
- Rights vs. responsibilities

Kaestle (1983) identified the key propositions that grew from the realms of nineteenth century religion, politics, and economics: the sacredness and fragility of republican government, including concepts about justice, individual liberty and consent of the governed; the importance of individual character for social morality; the centrality of personal industry in assessing rectitude and merit; the propriety of a respected but proscribed domestic role for women; the sanctity and social virtues of property; the abundance of equality of economic opportunity; the superiority of Protestant culture, and the uniqueness and grandeur of American destiny.

The notions above were uncontested by the majority of the American public during the 1800s. However, John Dewey advanced secularism to a controversial degree at the turn of the century. For Dewey, human interaction, not religion, was the main source of morality. According to Kaestle (1984, p. 105), "Dewey and his followers tried to leave the religious battles of the nineteenth century behind and engage school morality in the problems of twentieth century industrial society" (p. 105). Michaelson (1970, p. 257) elaborates: "at this juncture, what seemed to be needed was a 'common faith' which would emerge from the democratic community...from life together, not from a transcendent entity or a historical tradition." Dewey's pragmatism was criticized for being morally relativist and permissive, whereas Dewey thought of it as utilitarian (Kaestle, 1984).

Over the years there have been debates about the role of a good citizen. There have been pleas for citizenship education to not include only platitudes, but also to include strategies to solve societal problems such as poverty. In the early twentieth century, the content area of social studies was specifically developed in order to cultivate a more active participatory citizenship (Dunn, as cited in Wade and Saxe, 1996, p. 337)

There have also been debates over whether "solving societal problems" means simple altruism (such as making Thanksgiving baskets for the homeless) or systematic reform (such as identifying and eliminating the causes of poverty). Kahne and Westheimer (1996) state that those who favor altruism believe that a proper education includes experiences that teach students the values of charity and the dangers of exclusive self-interest. They stress that volunteerism and compassion for the less fortunate are ways to be responsive, civic-minded, and good citizens. The risk here, according to Kahn and Westheimer (1996), is a sense of noblesse oblige - "a private act of kindness performed by the privileged" (p. 593). In contrast, those who focus on systematic reform promote a curriculum that emphasizes critical reflection about social policies, the skills of political participation, and the formation of social bonds. Many have axiomatically noted that while solving societal problems is a right, is it also a responsibility? Parts III and IV of this paper will discuss how present policy and practice are dealing with these challenges.

Intellectual Domain

The intellectual domain of character education may be the least controversial dimension of character education. In this domain, character education can further a number of goals, including:

- Engaging higher-order thinking skills
- Promote interdisciplinary studies
- Examine one's own moral development

When the nineteenth century brought more child-centered views of European educators, as well as increased ethnic and religious diversity, moral education change. There was a shift away from the Puritan Bible and toward the more secular McGuffey Readers. These texts included short stories from which students identified particular morals. In doing this, students used thought processes (rather than rote memorization and fear) to determine the meaning of the stories and relate them to their own moral development. This trend advanced, and in the early 1900s the National Education Association (NEA) decided to formalize the intellectual domain. In 1916, the Committee on Social Studies, appointed as part of the Commission on the Re-organization of Secondary Education and sponsored by the NEA, recommended the development of a "Problems of Democracy" course. This course would "look at actual problems, issues, conditions of 'vital importance to society and of immediate interest t the pupil...as they occurred in their several aspects, political, economic, and social' and would fuse content from political science, economics, and sociology" (Evans, 1989, p. 178). The intellectual domain has broadened its scope considerably in recent times, as will be described in Parts III and IV of this paper.

III. Current American Policy and Practice

Several factors are pushing character education to the forefront of U.S. education policy. As schools became "in loco parentis" agents, they lost a sense of being an extension of the family. As Ryan (as cited in Fisher, 1995b) puts it, educators have become "technicians, information jockeys, playing a neutral, facilitating role in moral issues." He says this process is "wrapped up in the romantic philosophy that children have natural wisdom--leave them alone and they'll find what is right. It assumes that we have nothing form our history or culture to teach". While the notion of "moral anchoring" begins with the family, Education Secretary Richard Riley (1994) states that it's time to "raise the level of national dialogue on character." The "narcotic quality" of media and the growing importance of peer groups in influencing adolescent behavior, according to Riley (1994), symbolize a need to revive character education. The public seems to agree. A Phi Delta Kappa survey asked the public, "Do you want schools to teach moral education?" Seventy-nine percent of the public said yes, and among those who have school-age children, 84% said yes (as cited in Fisher, 1995b). The Michigan PTA president echoes these feelings, stating that civic and moral values have an important place in schools (Preston, 1997). She also emphasizes the importance of parent education on helping the nation's youngsters build character. The federal government is responding to this cry for character education.

In 1996, the government allotted Title X funds for the Improvement of Education: Partnerships in Character Education Pilot Projects. Approximately \$860,000 were awarded to state education departments in California, Iowa, New Mexico, and Utah to help districts develop and implement curriculum materials, train teachers, and complete other activities that incorporated the following elements of character:

- Caring

- Civic virtue and citizenship
- Justice and fairness
- Respect
- Responsibility
- Trustworthiness
- Any other elements deemed appropriate by the district

(Department of Education, 1996)

These ideals are reminiscent of those advocated by the McGuffey Readers of last century! Yet, the last element in the list above allows for some flexibility and local control. According to the Department of Education website, objectives of some of the pilot sites include:

- Create a data bank on character education
- Give technical assistance to the pilot schools for planning
- Insure diversity in staff, students, and geographic locations of the pilot schools
- Provide opportunities for other public and private schools to utilize the resources developed
- Establish a clearinghouse on character education
- To incorporate positive character qualities into all levels of the existing educational program
- Develop and implement a community-wide process to seek the desired character traits
- To ensure that character traits taught in schools are also modeled in local communities

Another federal initiative is the U.S. Department of *Education's America Goes Back to School Initiative*, which holds family involvement conferences. Through a joint effort with the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education, the Department of Education promotes parent training and involvement in improving the character of America's youth.

The National and Community Service Act of 1990 formed the Corporation of National Service. This service supports volunteers and community-based initiatives to improve education. In 1993, the National Service Trust Act was added in order to form AmeriCorps. AmeriCorps is a national umbrella organization that supports several initiatives, including character education formation. The 1993 act created the Learn and Serve America program, which provided almost \$700,000 in grants to states interested in creating the service-learning model of character education (explained in Part IV).

Another federal initiative is President Clinton's proclamation of October 19-25 as National "Character Counts" week. A Department of Education Press Release (Office of the Press Secretary, 1997) includes President Clinton's words: "Instilling sound character in our children is essential to maintaining the strength of our Nation into the 21st century. The core ethical values of trustworthiness, fairness, responsibility, caring, respect, and citizenship form the foundation of our democracy, our economy, and our society." He continues to say that these qualities are learned, not innate, and extols V-chips, Anti-Gang and Youth Violence Strategies, and districts that have curricular requirements for student volunteerism. Certainly the ideas are more secular than sectarian, but these initiatives revive the battle between universal and local ruling.

The idea of common secular values is alive and well outside of the White House, as well. For example, all nine schools in West Bloomfield, Michigan post these top ten "American Values for American Schools" (Naylor, 1996):

1. I will accept responsibility for all my actions.
2. I will respect the dignity and property of my fellow students and teachers and will never seek to do them harm.
3. I will keep all the promises that I make, fulfilling the trust that other people place in me.
4. I will complete projects and courses of study which I have begun.
5. I will strive for excellence in all my work and will respect achievement in my fellow students.
6. I will discipline myself to listen, learn, and study, recognizing that long-run achievement is more important to my happiness than short-run pleasure.
7. I will not use any substance which will destroy my health and undermine my dignity.
8. I will respect the authority of my parents and teacher, because that authority is necessary for the welfare of my family, school, and community.
9. I will train myself to be useful to others.
10. I will work together with others to improve my school, community, and world.

Despite the Puritan flavor of items 1, 4, 6, and 9, these tenets seem to stress the utilitarian view advocated by Dewey earlier in the century. By having students accept responsibility for their studies, they are effectively contributing to the "miniature community" of the school. Item 10 also characterizes the thought of the political domain of character education, with its civic focus on improving society. Items 2 and 8, while worthwhile, are reminiscent of the colonial days when order and hierarchy were highly valued.

The intellectual domain is also active in today's character education conversation. The Child Development Project (CDP) offers a comprehensive character education program that, among other things, includes using children's literature to reflect on core values. In a longitudinal research evaluation, students in three CDP elementary schools, compared to students in matched control schools, were found to be more considerate and cooperative in their classrooms; more likely to feel accepted by their peers; more skilled at solving interpersonal problems; and more strongly committed

to democratic values such as including all members of a group in a decision. In a follow up study in the eighth grade, CDP students shows stronger conflict resolution skills and had greater self-esteem (Tikkun, 1997).

Compulsory volunteer work is gaining more and more national attention. Earlier this year, Maryland mandated that every student complete 75 hours of volunteer service in order to graduate. The purpose is not only to help youngsters feel good about themselves, bus also to help solve social problems. Maryland Lt. Governor Kathleen Kennedy Townsend (as cited in Smith, 1997), who led the campaign states: "In the late 20th century America, we had very little language that articulated our duty to others, our responsibility as citizens to get involved. The only language we had was the language of self-fulfillment." Legislators across the country are considering passing similar bills. However, researchers say that many students are already motivated to serve, and school-based requirements may be unnecessary. There is a fair bit of controversy in the debate between universal and local rulings. Again we wonder, is civic duty a right or a responsibility? Townsend apparently sees it as a responsibility, observing that "in a democracy, a well-developed sense of community is required of citizens to counterbalance individualism and freedom, that if unchecked, can lead to such problems as environmental pollution or protections for pornographers" (Smith, 1997). However, the moral domain question "What is a good person?" emerges once again here. Is too much individual freedom such a bad thing?

IV. Service-Learning: A Possible Solution?

What is service-learning?

With the present day emphasis on civic involvement, the deterioration of communities, and the waning of academic skills, service-learning seems to be a strong model for character education. What is service-learning? Service-learning is a method of implementing service projects that goes way beyond candy sales and haphazard clothing drives. Instead, students use academic knowledge and critical thinking skills to plan, implement, and reflect on service projects that address genuine community needs. Trained adult facilitators guide students as they enter the world of service, or, as Lave and Wenger (1990) might call it, a "community of practice."

Perhaps the clearest way to show the components of service-learning is through an example. In Durango, CO, a middle school was involved in a project called "Breaking Cycles of Violence." Integrated throughout the middle school curriculum, the project goals were to: 1) explore the use of conflict resolution strategies; 2.) practice writing and speaking skills; 3.) work together as a team; 4.) foster communication among younger students about violence prevention, and 5.) assess students' own values and concerns about violence in schools. The focus of language arts became the production of a video about conflict resolution among middle school students. Students engaged in discussion groups, wrote and acted in skits, wrote and performed narratives, painted credits for the video, and actually filmed the video with the assistance of a local agency. The video was presented to a fifth-grade class at a nearby elementary school. As part of the presentation, the students wrote discussion questions and facilitated a discussion with fifth graders about violence and positive conflict resolution in school. Students used insights gained from their reflections to improve the project throughout its duration. (Billig and Kraft, 1996, p. 4-4).

The Infinite power of Constructivism

Not only does it acknowledge many of the moral, political, and intellectual tensions of character education, but it also embodies the extremely powerful and increasingly talked about philosophy of constructivism. In fact a landmark Department of Education study on Curriculum Reforms (1996) cites generating, facilitating, and assessing the constructivist learning among students as the most desired teacher outcomes. Constructivist approaches to all content areas (especially math, science, and technology) are becoming increasingly popular.

So what is constructivism, and how can it develop character in students? Rather than advocating the passive acceptance of Biblical and democratic values, constructivism refers to students using their own experience, collaboration with others, and reflections to create meaningful knowledge. Constructivism has been referred to as an environment, attitude, a philosophy, a learning technique, and a teaching methodology. Some of the characteristics of a constructivist learning environment are:

1. Provide experience with the knowledge construction process
2. Provide experience in and appreciation for multiple perspectives
3. Embed learning in realistic and relevant contexts
4. Encourage ownership and voice in the learning process
5. Embed learning in social experience
6. Encourage the use of multiple modes of representation
7. Encourage self-awareness of the knowledge construction process

(Honebein, 1996)

Constructivism pervades all three domains of character education. In constructivist service-learning activities, students are challenged to uncover their own morals, political interpretations, and intellect. Specifically, service-learning accomplishes this feat by following these basic tenets:

1. Students use high-level thinking and skills to make meaningful contributions to the community.
2. Reflection is an essential element in service-learning.
3. Skilled adult guidance is essential to the success of service-learning.

Following is a discussion of how constructivism is infused in these tenets, and how this infusion creates a powerful vehicle for character education.

Note: Constructivist traits of service-learning are italicized for emphasis.

Tenet 1: Students use high-level thinking and skills to make meaningful contributions to the community.

While the underlying philosophy of this tenet is to contribute to society and make systematic reform (political domain), this tenet thoroughly explores the intellect of students. Service-learning students are faced with several *ill-structured problems* that have no simple solutions: What are some problems in our community? What are the most effective ways of solving these problems? What resources do we need to solve these problems? Students pursue human, published, and electronic resources in their quest for answers. For example, in order to answer the first question, students may conduct community needs assessments through observations, surveys, interviews with community leaders, library research, or study on-line demography tables. The activities are *embedded naturally* throughout the curriculum. For example, students may utilize concise yet comprehensive language, correct grammar, oral language skills in conducting the needs assessment survey; a spreadsheet program to graph the results, and statistical knowledge to interpret the results.

The authentic nature of service-learning activities is marked by extensive *collaboration* among students. Group development is a very explicit part of the service-learning, as not all students intuitively "know" how to appropriately interact with others on problem-solving. Some activities prescribed by the Texas-based Peer Assistance and Leadership and Community Service-Learning Program are:

- Purse and Wallet: Students divide into groups of five and share something from their purses/wallet/pockets and , in sharing the things, share a little of themselves.
- Group Juggling: Students stand in a circle toss and increasing number balls back and forth in a certain pattern in order to concretize the importance of group cooperation to achieve goals.
- Human Knot: Students clasp hands in a way that ties them in a "human knot." Teamwork and leadership skills emerge as students "undo" themselves.

As a result, students progress through the Five Stages of Group Development:

1. Closed: Members gather together; little is known.
2. Open: Feel comfortable with group members
3. Trust: Feel safe to disclose thoughts and feelings.
4. Belief: Believe in the possibilities of the group and the program.
5. Goal: Set group goals; design service learning projects that the group can do. (PALS Teacher's Manual, p. 85)

In the Goal stage, students work cooperatively to find solutions to their ill-structured problems. Cooperative learning provides an safe environment in which students are more willing to *take risks* and think divergently with their problem-solving approaches. Moreover, collaborating students *scaffold* and support each other as they stretch their thinking skills (Dunlap and Grabinger, 1996). In addition, the complexity of students' knowledge increases as they interpret different viewpoints and become what Osana, Derry, and Levin (1996, p. 84) call "*collaborative reasoners*." Consensus building and resolving conflicts can deepen students' understanding and increase *generative knowledge* (Doise and Mugny, 1984).

As students get more accustomed to solution-seeking in different contexts, their *epistemic fluency* increases. That is, students develop the ability to view problems and solutions from different viewpoints, play different "epistemic games" (Morrison and Collins, 1996). Service learning is a playing field for several functional analysis games such as critical event (in which students explore the consequences derived from a community event) and problem-centered (in which student break an "event stream" into problems and actions to solve them (Wilson and Cole, 1996).

Tenet 2: Reflection is an essential element in service-learning.

By reflecting on service activities, service-learning students can create their own notions of morality, of what "makes a good person." They also challenge their intellect by critically examining their project design. Daily and weekly reflection discussions and writings on service projects are media to express reactions, to elaborate on incidents, or contemplate one one's roles. To ensure the deepest reflection, students often use a variety of cognitive tools. For example, students need to differentiate

between analytical and *relational* modes of thinking; students should organize observations and categorize thoughts; students should be exposed to passages from classic literature at relevant points; and students should understand that in reflective dialogue, the point is to *understand*, not necessarily to be "right" (Silcox, 1993). Here, students can battle with the age old tensions in the moral and political domains of character education.

According to McPherson (1989), reflection aids in cognitive development in several ways. By examining experiences, students learn how to handle real life problems more effectively and with a higher *transfer of learning*. An increased sense of *personal power* emerges as students analyze their goals and ways to achieve them. Moreover, by reflecting and sharing reflections, students get to see "*the big picture*" and discover connections across content area classes. McPherson (1989) also sees affective benefits through reflection. By analyzing *the value of new learning*, learning becomes more permanent. Students may also become more intrinsically motivated to seek knowledge as their value for it increases. Also, reflection can serve as a sort of self or group celebration to express satisfaction from good deeds done.

Finally, McPherson (1989) states that by critically analyzing their service projects, students can come up with better ways to meet their community's needs. Consequently, students see a connection between their values and society's reactions.

Tenet 3: Skilled adult guidance is essential to the success of service-learning.

Rather than letting students completely loose, service-learning teachers act as models and facilitators in *anchored instruction*. One service-learning manual asks (and answers) the question: What does it take to be an effective service-learning teacher? First, teachers should have *rapport* with students. In fact, many schools survey the students themselves to determine who the PALS teacher at the school will be. Second, the teacher plays the role not of an information dispenser, but rather as someone who maximizes a sense of ownership, involvement, and responsibility on the part of students themselves. The manual itself states :

This requires the ability to step back from the conventional role of adult authority figure, and to recognize that students both need and deserve to play a significant role in "owning" the course. It also requires the ability to wear many hats: *planner, organizer, role model, confidante, guide, facilitator, friend.* (p. 17)

Third, the teacher must have a fundamental *trust and belief* in the capabilities of young people that they will make positive changes. Without this faith in students, a teacher may be tempted to become a transmitter rather than a nurturer of knowledge. Finally, teachers must be responsive to students' needs and interests while developing and carrying out the project. To accomplish this, teachers include student input in all stages of instructional design. This way of thinking is quite a contrast from the Puritan days when teachers were powerful transmitters of knowledge. In a safe and relaxed setting, students may feel comfortable enough to critically examine their morals and ideas of democracy.

Implementation and Feasibility

So, how does service-learning become a reality in schools and communities? I will use three sources to answer this question: a RMC corporation manual entitled Linking Title I and Service-Learning, the Peer Assistance and Leadership in Community Service-Learning (PCSL) Curriculum Guide, and my own experience with fourth graders in South Texas.

I first heard about service-learning during my first year of teaching. As part of the Teach for America program, I was teaching a fourth grade bilingual classroom a few miles from the Mexican border. I was shocked by the poverty of the residents and the apathy of local politicians. Yet, I was inspired by the happy, eager faces I saw on my students' faces every day. Yes, the idealist in me was delighted and flourishing! Halfway through my first year, my fellow "TFA-ers" and I attended a service-learning workshop sponsored by Teach for America.

The workshop was very hands-on. We teachers learned, discussed, and reflected on the different components of service-learning. We role-played community discussions, classroom situations, and faculty meetings that might take place when we actually implemented service-learning projects in our schools. The highlight, of course, was actually planning and implementing a service project during the workshop itself. As you could imagine, we were an easy audience. Most of us had been involved with community service for years, and we were eager to learn ways to nurture a sense of service in our schools.

But how does the service-learning community entice skeptics into embracing this approach? Two widely-used training manuals utilize the following techniques:

- They present a variety of research that supports service-learning approaches.
- They involve an actual service-learning project--from planning to implementation to reflection--for teachers to do during the training session itself.
- They provide easy to use templates and decision-making tools to simplify the planning and implementation of service-learning projects.
- They provide activities that nurture a sense of "shared learning" throughout the training process, thus validating everyone's viewpoints.

(Billig and Kraft, 1996; Workers Assistance Program, Inc., 1994)

From my own anecdotal evidence, service-learning trainers are usually very energetic people whose passion for this approach is naturally contagious. The fun, interactive, and persuasive nature of service-learning training can convert even the most traditional teachers!

Even then, however, it's difficult to ensure that teachers will take service-learning to their classrooms. In my opinion, that's OK. Service-learning is not just a teaching method. Like other reforms such as technology integration, service-learning involves a complex set of beliefs about learning and teaching. Because of its complexity, service-learning may be implemented by just one teacher in an entire district. In my experience, I was that teacher. I talked my interdisciplinary team into stretching a unit on "communities" to last an extra few weeks. During that time, we planned and implemented a walking field trip to the local Habitat for Humanity site. Our students, most of whom depended on public aid for their own living expenses, were for the first time challenged to give something back to the community. By the time we got back to school, they had already come up with a dozen ways that they could help Habitat for Humanity. We did implement a project that rejuvenated the teachers, students, and community. Because we got so much attention from the local media, other teachers started embracing this approach and began planning wonderful projects of their own. Giving teachers the choice to do service-learning is, in my opinion, much more powerful than giving them threats if they don't do it.

For teachers who decide to do a service-learning project, Billig and Kraft (1996, p. 7) suggest a following sequence of steps.

In Step One, the teacher (or teachers, administrators, parents, etc. I will use the term "teacher" for simplicity.) comes up with the idea to do a project. She may not have a specific plan, but she is ready to assess needs and concerns. In my case, I knew I wanted to do a project that combined Habitat for Humanity and technology. I shared this idea with my four teammates. The idea soon became *our* project, and the five of us really created an unstoppable momentum. Having a planning team provided the multiple perspectives and created the division of labor that improved the process and product of the project. However, I think a dedicated individual teacher could implement service-learning on her own.

In Step 2A, the planning team conducts an assessment of students' academic and social needs. Teachers can utilize test scores, grades, behavior records, and their own observation to prioritize these needs. After analyzing our own anecdotal notes and grades, we decided that oral language development, civic duty, and math applications were major needs in our students. Secondly, teachers assess needs of the community, such as pollution, drugs, racism, or housing. Of course, students may be invited to participate in this portion of the planning. We teachers decided that housing was a major problem in our community, as many students lived in dingy colonias on the outskirts of town.

In Step 2B, teachers may want to consider conducting meetings or focus groups with teachers, parents, and students to gauge their interest in service-learning. Practitioners advise exchanging information rather than making decisions during these sessions. Doing so, they say, will make the process more efficient (Billig and Kraft, 1996). In our case, we breezed through this step because we had such a small project. Since we were all in agreement, we moved on to the next step.

Step 3 is the decision-making step. At this point, the planning team reviews the available information and decides whether it is worth it to go further. I contacted Habitat for Humanity and told them about our plan. They were very supportive and eager to have us visit their site. They even offered to come to our classroom and meet with the students beforehand. We also talked to our principal. She was delighted by the thought of getting good publicity for our school. We realized it was time to start writing things down.

Step 4 is an important step. Here, teachers plan the actual project design. PCSL offers some ideas such as collecting and distributing food for the poor, performing a skit on drug awareness for younger children, and researching and advocating for local policies on issues of interest. Following is a skeleton of our project design:

- Goal: Students will go through all of the stages of running a desktop publishing company in order to raise money for Habitat for Humanity. Students will increase their oral language skills, develop their sense of civic duty, learn career-enhancing business skills, learn the fundamentals of desktop publishing, and experience a real-life application of math.
- Instructional design: In Math, students will primarily count money raised, do a statistical analysis of the market research, and estimate profits. In Science, students will make comparisons between human and animal communities. In Language Arts, students will create advertisements and write reflections on their service activities. In Social Studies, students will examine floor plans, make cartoons describing the house-building process, learn desktop publishing skills, and basically organize and run the company. Each teacher on the team teaches a different subject, and we each wrote our own lesson plans for our parts of the project. Again, I found that working on a small scale increased our efficiency and effectiveness.
- Reflections: While most of the written student reflections took place in Language Arts class, we planned to have oral reflections in all classes. Questions recommended by Billig and Kraft (1996, p. 8-9) are:

- What happened as a result of your service-learning activity?

- What academic skills did you use in your project?
- How does what you learned today apply to other situations?
- How would you describe your experience to a student who knows nothing about service-learning?

Step 5 is project implementation. Student ownership of the project was important to us, and we taught our lessons in a way that made students come up with our ideas on their own. Of course, we knew we had to be flexible in case students were eager to follow a different path. Throughout this stage, I had further contact with my principal (who supplied \$60 in capital for our business). I also contacted the local newspaper on the day of our field trip. Our front page story certainly helped business and really excited the students.

Steps 6A and 6B basically ensure a smooth project. By staying aware and responding to stakeholders' expectations, we had continued financial and emotional support. Administrators, students, and even a few parents purchased our business cards. The most salient operational issues were 1.) borrowing a laser printer from central office and 2.) keeping up with our inventory. Again, I feel that because we started small, the project was extremely manageable.

Finally, Step 7 refers to evaluation and assessment. While some practitioners advocate extensive evaluations, we relied mostly on our anecdotal records. All five teachers noted a huge increase in student (and teacher!) motivation in all subject areas, self-confidence in speaking skills, a greater sense of futurity (brought on by their new-found business skills) and a realization of civic duty. We based our conclusions on the fact that, among other things, many students stayed in at recess to work on the computer to make business cards, several students stated that they wanted to work for Habitat for Humanity when they got older (one even got his father to start volunteering!), and even the most limited English proficient students took initiative in interviewing teachers as part of our market research.

These steps, of course, are merely suggestions made by service-learning practitioners. Despite the great amount of planning we teachers did, students essentially determined the course the project would take. We felt this was vital in keeping with constructivist philosophy. Publicity from the local media, the visibility of our students selling business cards at lunch, the massive walking field trip, and the ebullience with which we teachers spoke about our project really helped service-learning spread on our campus. I feel that if we had done some quantifiable pre- and post tests on students' academic skills, social skills, and motivation, we would have had even more substance to our cause. I also believe that easy-to-use materials such as the samples included in the appendix will help motivate teachers to get started on planning service-learning projects.

V. Conclusion

In conclusion, character education has evolved greatly since it's Puritan roots. It is clear that an increasingly pluralistic society has secularized this field. However, social deterioration has engendered its revival. Through grants, National Character Week, and other initiatives, federal and state governments are reviving a national conversation on the moral, political, and intellectual domains of character education. New educational philosophies such as constructivism are allowing us to view character education in a new light--one that focuses on the students' determining their *own* moral, political, and intellectual stances on character, rather than having them dictated to them.

Service-learning is a potentially ideal model for character education in the United States today. Its constructivist ideology allows students to develop their own virtues while improving their communities. It emphasizes the political domain through its emphasis on civic duty; the intellectual domain in its reflection component and integration throughout the regular school curriculum; and the moral domain that emphasizes the greater good. Service-learning is becoming so popular in fact that the federal government has created a grants program specifically dedicated to spreading this concept throughout the country. Learn and Serve America, which was created in 1995, helps more than

780,000 students perform reflective, academically-infused, character-building service to their communities. Students who participate in service-learning programs have shown increased interest in school and have improved their academic performance (Corporation of National Service, 1997). Moreover, local support for service-learning programs is strong. In order to receive grants, local agencies must match funds at varying rates.

Of course, students may occasionally choose controversial service projects, such as caring for AIDS patients or fighting for rights of lesbians and gay men. However, because service-learning projects are determined at the site and classroom level rather than the state level, political delays may be minimized. Hopefully the strong secular framework and federal support of this model will keep service-learning afloat in this country's sea of ideological conflict.

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