

## **An Historical Analysis of Character Education**

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*What is termed 'character education' in today's world has been called many things throughout the history of education in this country. Character education has been both a formal and informal part of schools. Much of character education in the United States can be closely tied in its roots to the education of character in Europe, which laid the foundation for the formal American system of education. Through historical analysis, this article will seek to uncover and reflect upon one pathway that brought character education to the shores of America. A variety of contributions from significant figures and organizations, from the 18th century through today, will be highlighted in order to provide some understanding as to the complexity of the roots of character education in America.*

Relatively recent executive action pertaining to character education has been on the rise as noted by a significant increase in funding. President Reagan began the fiscal race to support character education when he noted the immediate need for character education in schools (Leming, 1997, p. 11). President Clinton then acted with urgency when he tripled funding for character education (Hymowitz, 2003, p. 105). More recently, President George W. Bush also asked Congress to triple dollars allocated toward character education (Davis, 2006, p. 11). It is difficult to estimate the amount of money that is spent each year on character education programs because of the complex mix of funding that comes from federal, state, and local governments, and also from individual schools, businesses, and fundraising campaigns. It is certain, however, that the total measures somewhere in the billions of dollars (p. 11).

What is termed character education in today's world has been called many things throughout the history of education in this country. Character education has been both a formal and informal part of schools. At times it has been integrated in small ways into many other pieces of the curriculum. For example, early character education programs in America focused on using the Bible to teach subjects including reading, writing, and history. At other times it has been a unique piece of the curriculum as highlighted by the variety of standalone character education programs that are currently running in schools today.

Much of character education in the United States can be closely tied in its roots to the education of character in Europe, which laid the foundation for the formal American system of education. Through historical analysis, this article will seek to uncover and reflect upon one

pathway that brought character education to the shores of America. A variety of contributions from significant figures and organizations, from the 18th century through today, will be highlighted in order to provide some understanding as to the complexity of the roots of character education in America. The individuals and organizations were chosen for their meaningful influences upon character as it related to the educational systems of yesterday and today.

This article will begin by discussing one of a number of possible historical foundations of character education in America, including some pivotal European contributions from Kant, Comte, Renouvier, and Ferry. Next, some early American influences on character education will be outlined, including those of Franklin, Mann, and McGuffey. The importance of some early character education programs in America, including the Young Men's Christian Association and the Boy Scouts of America, will then be noted. Following, a few impactful 20th century influences on character education, including social studies educators, movements from the Religious Right, and several modern school tragedies will be identified. Finally, some implications for modern character education programs will be suggested.

### ***Historical Foundations of Character Education***

The teachings of Kant, Comte, and Renouvier were renowned for their modern and enlightened philosophies of individuals and education. Kant, and later Renouvier, who based his sense of student character on Kant, expected religious morality in education (Stock-Morton, 1988, p. 107). Comte, on the other hand, viewed the moral growth and development of students as a more modern and scientific principle, separate from that of staunch religious instruction (p. 122). The struggle to define and institute the education of character within France provides an important connection to the development of character education, including the struggle to focus on either religious or secular morality, within the United States.

The rivalry to define and implement morality into education in 19th century France can be viewed quite clearly by observing the educational atmosphere during the time of French philosopher Charles Renouvier. Similar to modern principles of character education in the United States, Renouvier felt that it was the duty of French society to include moral components within education in order to battle a "weakening sense of duty" that youth were experiencing, a loss of "justice," "equality," "reciprocity," "rights," and "respect" (Stock-Morton, 1988, p. 85). This might suggest that, in similar fashion to the concerns of modern education character

education programs, students were committing undesirable acts and perhaps not achieving socially acceptable levels of academic achievement. Renouvier was appalled at the lack of morals in French education and felt that students should learn throughout their educational careers not only how to make moral decisions, but also should be educated as to the obligations that they held to participate in an ethical manner in French society (pp. 85-86). This notion of morality in education was conveyed powerfully throughout Renouvier's works.

While the period of Renouvier was marked by strict adherence to religion in the development of character, the Enlightenment period brought with it a transition that marked a recognizable shift. The action and responsibility that were once allocated to God had transformed to become focused on Man. This transition from a religious morality to a secular morality was highlighted during the time of French Minister of Education Jules François Camille Ferry. Ferry argued for the use of morals in school, but in a delicate way. He felt that morals were essential in the classroom, but that overtly religious teachings of morality were not necessary to educate the character of the student body (Stock-Morton, 1988, pp. 98, 100, 104). Under Ferry, to the chagrin of most teachers who did want to teach a more modern morality but who wanted to see the instruction as a cohesive element tangential to every subject, French educational law required the instruction of morals as a separate subject that enlightened students as to their duties to themselves, their families, humankind, France, and God (pp. 101-104). Teachers were mandated to instruct and model character-building components to students on a daily basis. The goal was to encourage universal belief and understanding of human morality, which went beyond any individual religious doctrine and included multiple religious traditions, in key areas such as "justice, wisdom and beneficence" (Stock-Morton, 1988, pp. 102-104). This would be accomplished through discussion and activity that focused on challenging situations and through the lives of significant individuals who faced dilemmas in the past (p. 104). Thus, religion was still a strong part of the moral equation, but it was not all encompassing, and the instruction of character shifted away from a mainly religious source to the teacher within the classroom.

Politically, religiously, and culturally, this marked a distinct change from the educational instruction of the past, particularly those ideologies that were professed by Renouvier. The Right wanted continued instruction of morality by those who were most qualified to teach it – religious leaders. This change of focus to the teacher greatly angered the political Right who pressured Ferry to allow for additional, separate religious instruction for students by religious leaders while

on school grounds (p. 99). This time also marked a distinct shift in the character development of students from a mainly ecclesiastical focus to a much more secular focus. The “enlightened” age of Comte had now emerged and a new type of moral instruction, one that focused on the scientific method and modern philosophy, had begun (pp. 107, 122). This type of character development is what set the stage for the moral growth and development of students in the classroom within the United States. This “enlightened” morality was what important educational figures, such as Horace Mann, noted as lacking within American education, and strove to infuse into that same system. Mann noted that in the absence of morality, the character of students would not fully develop and, presumably, negative effects such as undesirable behavior and decreasing academics would occur. Presumably, many of these undesirable behaviors, including talking back to the teacher, verbal bullying of other students, and acts of physical aggression, would be the same types of incidents that occur in classrooms today and that drive the need for character education in modern American classrooms.

### ***Early American Influences on Character Education***

There have been a number of individuals who were extremely influential in the development of education in America. Several of these individuals, including Benjamin Franklin (1706-1790), Horace Mann (1796-1859), and William McGuffey (1800-1873), substantially contributed to, not only the educational landscape, but also to the development of character within education. Franklin, Mann, and McGuffey were all involved in the legislation and foundation of public education in early America and each of them also had strong ties, and significant positions, within post-secondary institutions.

As a Founding Father of the United States, Benjamin Franklin had a tremendous influence on numerous aspects of American life. From an educational standpoint, he was pivotal in the growth and development of several higher education institutions. He was also one of several key proponents who advocated for a system of universal education in the United States (Franklin, 1749, pp. 3-7). Furthermore, Franklin took a strong position regarding the need to teach morality in public schools.

Franklin (1749, p. 30) proposed that morality and education were intricately conjoined and espoused the writings of John Locke. Not coincidentally, Locke provided a substantial foundation for the ideology of Kant, who, as was earlier stated, had such a strong influence on

Renouvier. Franklin (pp. 20, 23), in agreement with Locke, wrote about the need for morals to be taught within the context of history. Franklin discussed the many opportunities that history extended for the development of character within the student body. He extolled the use of history as a catalyst to provide occasions for moral communication in both written and oral forms (Franklin, 1749, pp. 22-23). Issues of “Right and Wrong,” “Justice and Injustice” would naturally be unveiled through historical research and would “fix in the Minds of Youth deep Impressions of the Beauty and Usefulness of Virtue of all Kinds, Public Spirit, Fortitude, etc” (pp. 20-23). As a predecessor to Jules Ferry, Franklin (p. 30) also discussed the need for students to learn about character within themselves, their families, and their society. Thus, Franklin, similarly to Horace Mann, the next individual who greatly influenced the character of students in American education, believed that students must be given opportunities to practice morality in the classroom. Both Franklin and Mann believed that through moral instruction, character would be developed and that there would be important benefits beyond the development of character alone including such aspects as better behavior in the classroom and that students would achieve higher academic performance.

Horace Mann, the most significant influence on character development in early American education, was an outspoken proponent of educational quality and reform. Mann felt that education provided an opportunity to enhance the physical, mental, and spiritual development of America’s youth (Downs, 1974, pp. 37, 45; Filler, 1965, p. 158). He felt that character was crucial to the educational process because it helped to make up for physical weaknesses to which the body was so susceptible (Cremin, 1969, p. 53; Downs, 1974, p. 22). For Mann, who held parallel convictions to those of Franklin and Ferry, students would benefit greatly from an education of character in all facets of the school environment that focused upon “the principles of piety, justice and a sacred regard to truth, love of their country, humanity and universal benevolence, sobriety, industry, frugality, chastity, moderation and temperance, and those other virtues, which are the ornament of human society” (Downs, 1974, pp. 37, 41). He was deeply concerned that moral education was lacking. He declared that the unquestionable reality and danger of current educational pedagogy, which was reflected in society, was not that students were lacking in proper factual instruction, but rather that students were lacking in something much more significant to the community; moral reasoning (Cremin, 1969, pp. 330-331). Thus,

education should be used not only as a tool to impart information, but also as a hand to perpetually guide that tool toward wisdom and truth (p. 52).

In addition to considering character a pivotal element of public education, Mann was also a supporter of universal education. He strongly agreed with the colonial founders of Massachusetts Bay who deemed that education should be universal and free to all students in society (Filler, 1965, pp. 99-102). Furthermore, he felt that not only should all students have access to universal and free education, but that there was a need for more females to participate in public education, particularly because females made the best teachers (Downs, 1974, p. 44). Mann noted the positive moral ramifications of including female students in education and character-building experiences within the classroom. He observed that children, who were generally raised by their mothers, would adopt the character components of their mothers, and that society would move toward moral growth or decline based upon the character preparation of the female gender (Filler, 1965, p. 160). Thus the character education of females would benefit all children, both as offspring and societal participants.

Mann clearly targeted the teacher, both female and male, as the purveyor of character in the classroom. He wrote extensively about the need for quality, knowledgeable, and moral educators who would intelligently and compassionately inspire and guide students to achieve success in their minds, bodies, and hearts. For Mann, teaching played such an important role in society that it was virtually a sacred privilege and responsibility (Cremin, 1969, pp. 111, 316, 330; Filler, 1965, p. 149).

It comes as no surprise, therefore, that Mann recognized a disturbing lack of quality concerning the preparation, moral rectitude, and pedagogy of many educators in the field in spite of the legal responsibilities to hire teachers with excellent intellectual and moral aptitude (Downs, 1974, p. 37). He strongly questioned why teachers did not have more training in order to increase the aptitude of poor instructors as well as create high-quality teachers for those individuals who showed potential but simply did not have the proper guidance (Cremin, 1969, p. 112). Mann did not place all the blame upon the shoulders of educators, for he recognized that other factors, such as school administration which occasionally succumbed to lapses of integrity due to multiple temptations of intellect and authority, created a negative atmosphere for students (Filler, 1965, p. 170). Mann correctly observed that school administrators also negatively impacted the education system when they hired teachers who were friends or relatives, or those

who exhibited poor modeling to students, particularly teachers who were poor moral models, rather than hire the most qualified individual for the job (Downs, 1974, p. 41). He was so adamant on this point that he stated morality was an “indispensable, all-controlling requisite” when schools were seeking to fill an appointment (Downs, 1974, p. 41). Mann also noted that mediocrity of instruction was all that society had demanded of education and instruction (p. 38). He lamented the reality that society, which was ever vigilant toward improving the intellectual and physical conditions of American youth, was unaware of, and unconcerned with, the deficient virtue to which students frequently fell prey (Cremin, 1969, pp. 109-110). These other factors did not, however, excuse teachers from their duties to provide an outstanding education for students. Mann proposed numerous guidelines for quality instruction.

Mann outlined the need for teachers to have numerous qualifications including content knowledge and organizational skills, but as previously stated, he was a strong proponent for teacher morality. It was moral guidance that would allow students to move outside of their own narrow viewpoints to factor in universal notions of good and evil in order to make decisions that were positive for all members of society (Downs, 1974, p. 45). Mann categorized two main avenues for the instruction of character in public schools. First, he noted that teachers themselves needed to have proper instruction concerning moral behavior so that they could exemplify moral behavior to students on a regular basis. Second, he proposed various strategies for teachers to accomplish the growth and development of character in students.

For Mann, teachers could greatly impact students by their ethics-in-action, particularly in the areas of “benevolence, conscience,” and “reverence” (Cremin, 1969, p. 88). In order for teachers to make such an impact on students, the teachers had to have strong knowledge of ethics as well as a predisposition to act upon those ethics inside the classroom on a daily basis. Mann noted that teachers who were properly trained in morals could make a quick and lasting impact upon the character of hundreds of students, while simultaneously he cautioned that teachers who were unable or unwilling to set a moral example could immediately destroy the character of those same students (Cremin, p. 85). Therefore, for the sake of American society, teachers needed to be confident in their moral abilities and continually exhibit self-respect for those abilities by passionately working with strength, confidence, and love to impact the character of all children in the classroom (Cremin, 1969, p. 92; Downs, 1974, p. 111). Mann did not feel that this was an effortless task. He understood that there were numerous students who fell short of the

moral benchmark, and he stated that the manipulation of character for these students required, “the utmost delicacy and felicity of touch to correct” (Cremin, 1969, p. 316). He knew that this required thoughtful consideration, vigorous manipulation, and masterful timing (Cremin, 1969, p. 316). Accordingly, successful teachers were those individuals who had not only the concrete conceptual training in morality, but also the necessary instructional strategies, such as timing, delivery, and discipline, that were necessary to infuse character into their students (p. 94).

One of the most important concepts for teachers to understand and implement pertaining to character education is the correct use of instructional timing, as well as the proper implementation strategy, when considering moral development in students. Mann felt that moral instruction, like factual material, needed to be imparted through the use of instruction, understanding, and practice in order for students to grow and benefit with any long-term achievement (Cremin, 1969, p. 103). Clearly, students needed concrete examples of individual and situational morality, which would exemplify aspects of “generosity, magnanimity, equity and self-sacrifice,” so that they could visualize and identify with morality in their own lives (Filler, 1965, p. 43). Teacher expectations needed to be realistic, and even though many individuals in society did not understand how to successfully formulate and expound upon character, teachers had to provide an ample amount of time for moral development in their students (p. 4).

Once a foundation for moral knowledge was laid, students needed to be able to actually practice what they learned (Cremin, 1969, p. 95). Teachers had to provide ample occasions for students to succeed in whichever areas they were deficient. For example, selfish students should be enlightened on the virtue of kindness and then given opportunities in the classroom to exercise the newfound character trait (p. 109). Mann, with a portentous grasp of child psychology, cautioned that students had to be motivated intrinsically, lest the entire process be tainted and the students lost to false understanding and selfish action (p. 103). This danger could be avoided as long as teachers had an intimate knowledge of each of their students. In this regard, Mann stated that the “mind[s]” and “heart[s]” of students should be open to, and closely monitored by, the teacher so that character education could be accomplished in a timely and responsible manner (Cremin, 1969, p. 316). In addition, he felt that serious efforts on the part of teachers must be displayed in order to accomplish effective character development (Downs,



1974, p. 46). The delivery of the message was as important, for Mann, as the timing and implementation strategies were for the successful formation of moral development in students.

Mann thought that students had to be approached, communicated with, and guided with a sense of responsibility and tact. He observed that successful communication involved encouraging students to discuss their individual character and content needs and obstacles within the formal and hidden curriculum (Cremin, 1969, p. 317). Students could not be coerced into action; they had to be directed with benign intent (Downs, 1974, p. 44). This type of exchange required tremendous patience on the part of instructors. For Mann, this was particularly important when students were lacking in sound character development. He stated that teachers needed to guide students through the use of altruism and fairness; to direct them constantly in measured quantities and bring them back to proper moral decision-making; to reward their efforts and progress in a fashion that encouraged them and assisted them in personal connection to moral individuals and actions (Cremin, 1969, pp. 108-109). The delivery of a positive message was much preferable to that of a punitive one.

Mann, unlike many educational leaders of the time, desired that the delivery of instructional content be free from hostility and punishment. Although he admitted that punishment was undesirable, Mann recognized that it was occasionally necessary. When it was required, it was never to be dispensed with zealous emotion, but rather as an act that gave more discomfort to the teacher than to the student (Cremin, 1969, pp. 327-328). In a fashion similar to that of teachers, it would be absurd for doctors to work on another human in a state of agitation and emotional distress, for the results would be disastrous for the unfortunate recipient (Filler, 1965, pp. 148-149). Punishment was not to be sought out or taken lightly. For the student, punishment could easily lead down a road composed of sorrow and vengeance, rather than one filled with compassion and joy (Cremin, 1969, p. 328). For Mann, proper teacher training and instructional implementation, not punishment, seemed like the moral avenue toward character development. Teachers needed to intimately know each student and guide those students with encouragement, compassion, and equity.

William Holmes McGuffey was another important individual in the early American character education movement who felt the need to understand each student on a personal and compassionate basis. McGuffey, with striking similarities to Franklin and Mann, was an educator whose educational convictions were far ahead of his time. His series of textbooks, the most

popular in history, were designed to help students learn to read, while introducing and solidifying character development in areas such as “patriotism,” “good citizenship,” and “morality” (Berger, 2000, p. 9; “William Holmes McGuffey,” 1993). McGuffey, just like Franklin and Mann, felt that morality was crucial to education. And, in similar fashion to Mann, he believed that values and education were inseparable and that the growth and development of character in students would be reflected in the health and happiness of American society in general (Downs, 1974, p. 45; “William Holmes McGuffey,” 1993). For McGuffey, in order to achieve a moral student body and the successful society that would ensue, the content and the delivery were also important to the stimulation of character within students.

McGuffey, who became a teacher at age 14, used his instructional experience and passion for the field of education to develop a specific system for teachers to use in the development of student reading. Students learned to read, while gaining content information and acquiring moral growth, through the use of various forms of literature. McGuffey, akin to Franklin and Mann, used historical documents in the form of poems, essays, stories, and the Bible, which assisted students in visualizing morality in practice and drawing personal connections to the material (Berger, 2000, p. 9; Filler, 1965, p. 43; Franklin, 1749, pp. 22-23). Thus the proper literature would help direct students toward important societal values such as “hard work, self-discipline, kindness, and perseverance” (Berger, 2000, p. 9). The content, however, was doomed to failure if the delivery of the message was lost in transition.

McGuffey knew, as Mann did, that teachers needed to model desired traits and actions for their students so that students could see and experience the development of character (Cremin, 1969, p. 88; “William Holmes McGuffey,” 1993). With the support of modeling, McGuffey, and Mann, noted that delivery of instruction had to be developed in a way that was cognitively appropriate and systematic so that students would not be overwhelmed, as well as tangible so that students would make connections to materials and events that they saw in their everyday lives (Berger, 2000, p. 9; Filler, 1965, pp. 4, 43). If the content and delivery were successful, students would learn and society would benefit.

The obvious and paramount importance of character in education, when viewed through a 19th century European lens, which included the likes of Kant, Comte, and Renouvier, led, in many ways, to the impressive individual educational contributions of Franklin, Mann, and McGuffey. These pivotal educational icons laid a foundation for the development of various

character programs that would be formulated in early 20th century America. These programs, including the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA) and Boy Scouts of America (BSA), would, in turn, influence American society as it struggled to define and implement character education throughout the 20th century and eventually lay the foundation for the most popular character education programs of today.

### ***Early Character Education Programs in America***

The historical and individual influences upon character education in the United States greatly impacted interest and acceptance pertaining to the development of formal character education programs. It seems that American society has, at numerous points in time, called for some sort of character education solution when perceived feelings of immorality seemed to plague the youth of the country. Character education, therefore, can be viewed as a wave that the tide has carried in and out due to societal pressures such as political, religious, or corporate influences.

Formal programs, such as the YMCA and BSA, grew and flourished under the societal auspice calling for necessary moral development of American youth. Several formal character-building programs, which were initially founded outside the domain of public education, have influenced American culture for more than 100 years. Although these programs were initially begun outside the sphere of public education, they have, in many ways, been woven into the fabric of public education.

In addition to these programs, there have been many other influences, including a call from social studies educators, a movement from the Religious Right, and the occurrences of several traumatic modern school tragedies, that bridged the gap between public life and public education in order to embrace the societal demand for character education in public schools. Finally, there are now several popular character education programs, including the Heartwood Program, CharacterCounts!, and the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs, that have flourished within the realm of public education.

Similar to today's character education programs, the YMCA, the BSA, and many other character programs did an effective job selling the need for their programs while, generally, failing miserably in describing what it was that character even meant (Macleod, 1983, p. 29). There was, and is, no universal definition of character that would assist individuals in the

comparison of ideals or the success of programs. The reality was that during the late 18th century, character programs in America, as noted earlier by the developments in France, were replacing religion as the purveyor of moral development for many young Americans (pp. 29-30). These programs built upon the wisdom of many important individuals, like Franklin, Mann, and McGuffey, and gave students a chance to actually exercise their moral fiber.

The YMCA began in the late 19th century in response to a perceived shift in the morality of American youth (p. xii). At this point in American history, world's fairs were being held and American capitalism, imperialism, and industry were growing rapidly. Consequently, there were increasing numbers of people who were moving into urban areas. In response to this flood of individuals, middle-class families, who were concerned that their values would be washed away, established character programs to make sure that their children, and values, would remain intact and in power (Macleod, 1983, pp. xiv-xvii). One of the most successful programs, the YMCA, was brought to the United States from London and flourished in this arena of middle-class fear and hope. The YMCA sought to develop the "mental, physical, social, and religious" aspects of American youth ("About the YMCA," n.d.; Macleod, 1983, p. 3). Or, rather, this development was sought for those American youth who were important, or wealthy, enough to be admitted into the program. Not surprisingly, the moral concerns for many Americans focused more closely on young white males and these boys were heavily recruited.

The YMCA provided sanctuary and comfort for middle-class youth. The Protestant values that were delivered helped to shore up the values that were conceivably dissolving in school and in the public arena ("About the YMCA," n.d.; Macleod, 1983, p. 10). It is important to note that the driving force behind the YMCA was the targeting of the middle class. Economically, the middle class could afford the program; politically, the middle class would support the program, and socially, the middle class values that stemmed from the Victorian Era were perceived as dominant, preferable, and the basis for the future of the country (Macleod, 1983, pp. 3, 35, 76). Members of the YMCA were benefited by group activities, discussions, sports, and activities. Because of a perceived immorality in the early 20th century, an effective administration, and the preference of many young men to enjoy peer activity rather than be subjected to family or employment obligations, the future of the YMCA was cemented as one of the preeminent organizations for the development of character in the United States.

The Boy Scouts of America (BSA) developed with many similarities to the YMCA. The BSA, also founded in London but brought to the United States in the early 20th century, had similar aims and a comparable clientele. While the YMCA pushed an agenda of spirit, mind, and body, the BSA advocated the 12 Scout laws. The Scout promised to be “trustworthy, loyal, helpful, friendly, courteous, kind, obedient, cheerful, thrifty, brave, clean, and reverent,” and vowed to “do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout law,” “to help other people at all times,” and “to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight” (Macleod, 1983, p. 29). The Scouting philosophy also advocated the use of morals in action. With the objectives of generating young men who were knowledgeable and experienced in fitness, character, and patriotism, the BSA offered a step-by-step system that took middle-class youth and directed them in a way that was morally sound and positive (“Boy Scouts,” 2008). This was true for a particular segment of society, but the BSA, as well as the YMCA, primarily ignored the needs of the lower class, at least in their initial stages (Macleod, 1983, p. 35).

Both the YMCA and the BSA did an excellent job with their organizational structures. They also played upon the fears of the middle class and proliferated a view of morally incompetent schools, which coincided with a declining religious base (Macleod, 1983, pp. 39, 41, 130). Furthermore, these organizations touted the need for middle-class youth to be removed from an increasing and undesirable lower-class influence. The YMCA and BSA obviously achieved success if that success was measured by the numbers of boys who entered the programs and enjoyed the benefits of exercise and excitement within a structured environment (p. 293). Whether the stated goals of character development were accomplished is left uncertain. What is unquestionable is the continued desire of the public to see character development incorporated into the educational arena.

### ***Twentieth Century Influences on Character Education***

There have been a formidable number of influences on character education in the United States during the 20th century. Several of these influences, including a call from social studies educators, a movement from the Religious Right, and the occurrences of several traumatic modern school tragedies, helped to move the character education movement from a tangential association with public education directly into the curriculum of public educational institutions.

In 1937, New York State decided to scrutinize the social studies curriculum that was offered in public schools. Roosevelt had proposed the New Deal to battle the Great Depression and World War II was beginning. School budgets, as with virtually all areas of governmental expenditures, were extraordinarily tight and there was a conscious societal shift toward more progressive styles of education. It is evident that New York State participated in this movement by the vigor with which the New York State Board of Regents pursued an investigation of the social studies curriculum. The Board went beyond traditional inquiries of history and geography and deeply probed students and teachers about pedagogy, interests, and abilities in numerous subject areas, most interestingly, with areas that dealt with character formation and actions.

During the review process, students were given a number of assessments to evaluate categories such as “fairness,” “responsibility,” “volunteer attitude,” and “group harmony” (Wilson, 1938, p. 71). Teachers were also broadly surveyed and overwhelmingly felt that the social studies curriculum should include values components including “respect,” and “honesty” (p. 134). Results suggested that social studies content, in order to be meaningful and successful, needed to be closely bridged with the personal lives and experiences of students (p. 107). This notion is still conveyed, yet seldom achieved, in modern social studies classrooms. It was also noted that the character component, which was stressed so vigorously in social studies classrooms, was a thread that needed to be woven throughout the entire school culture (Wilson, 1938, pp. 218-219).

The review led to the idea that citizenship would be the doorway in the New York State Social Studies structure that allowed progressive notions of character to enter and blossom within public education. *Education for Citizenship: Report of the Regents' Inquiry* conjoined the arenas of curriculum and values with incredibly powerful language of far-reaching character ideals that signified the very core of the Social Studies curriculum. The terminology set the stage for Social Studies as a tangible force that had the power to positively or negatively impact the values of not only students in the classroom, but the entirety of American society as well. The publication stated, for example:

Social studies derive their central importance in the school program because of their connection, real or assumed, with the elements of social competence in a democratic society. It is to be recognized, however, that these subjects alone cannot produce that elusive quality called ‘good citizenship.’ Social efficiency in

its wide sense is a product of forces reaching far beyond subject areas and beyond school walls. Yet the contribution of the social studies to social efficiency is their educational reason for existence, and if there are major defects in the civic competence of school graduates, the social studies must be partially responsible. To the extent that schools should focus attention on social deficiencies and to the extent that those deficiencies are broadly civic in character, the social studies are intimately concerned (Wilson, 1938, pp. 6-7).

The character component to the language did not blame the curriculum for the deficient values of society, but it certainly implied a significant measure of responsibility and a power to enact a potential moral metamorphosis.

Another period occurred in which advocates for character development in public education came, ironically, as a movement, by a unique percentage of the population, to abandon public education due to a perception that public education existed within a moral void. Throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s, Christian schools exploded on the education front. Reacting to drugs, violence, disrespect, deteriorating test scores, dysfunctional school bureaucracy, and teacher unions that seemed ambivalent to these, and other, issues of importance to Christian families, thousands of schools opened to accommodate the need for values in education (Reese, 2007, pp. 113-114, 116). Initially, as a reaction to the civil rights movement, numerous Christian schools opened in order to retain a separatist white society (Reese, 2007, p. 114). Simultaneously, however, many other fundamentalist and evangelical Christian schools were attempting to establish a new and different educational environment for their children. The parents of these children, who had once been strong supporters of public education, had come to view the Left, and government, as having lost control of the fundamentals of education (p. 114). Christian schools proposed to offer an education that was in league with parents rather than one that opposed them. This seemed particularly relevant when items such as textbook selections, health curriculum (particularly sexual education), discipline, religious instruction, and character were considered (pp. 120-121, 131). Furthermore, the religious schools offered models, the teachers, who were well versed in Christian theology, and chosen based upon the values that they lived and taught (pp. 127-128). This seemed an oasis for Christian parents when the alternative meant an education that was “godless, atheistic, immoral, and out-of-step with decent religious values.” (p. 118)

Christian school enrollment, beginning in the 1960s, broke the million-student mark, which, although modest compared to the millions of Catholic school students and the tens-of-millions in public schools, signified the importance of the movement (Reese, 2007, pp. 113-114). The Christian school movement grew faster than all other forms of private education in the 1980s, probably in reaction to the aforementioned issues in conjunction with the end of prayer in public education (pp. 118-119). With the establishment of so many Christian schools, it became impossible for the general populace, as well as the government, to ignore the siphoning off of so many pupils and education dollars due to sensationalized accusations of an utter lack of character within public education. Thus, the popularity of Christian schools, in addition to the fervent media portrayal of an ever-increasing number of violent and heart-wrenching school tragedies, have pushed character education, again, into the forefront of public education.

Another influence on character education in public schools concerns the occurrences of, and consequential media coverage of, several school shootings that have transpired within American society. Webber (2003, p. 1) outlined a litany of North American school shootings, which took place in fewer than 2 years, including those in Littleton, Taber, Conyers, Santee, and El Cajon. The author then proposed a number of factors that set the stage for violence in schools. Ironically, these factors, which are frequently purported to help students safely and successfully negotiate the school culture, may actually *promote* the occurrence of violence in schools.

First, an unbreakable bond between consumerism and education has influenced social culture within public schools (p. 4). This is on display on a daily basis through the appalling hypocrisy between what students are told and what students observe. For example, students are continually fed ideals of respect, conservation, communication, and justice. When schools are run like businesses however, these ideals are continually contrasted with concepts of efficiency, time management, wasteful environmental practices, communication in the form of “Zero Tolerance” doctrines, and justice that is unequivocally equated to power.

Second, there is an utter lack of conflict experiences that support successful student understanding and participation in their environment (Webber, 2003, p. 2). The opportunities that students have to negotiate and mediate disagreements that lead to potentially violent action, or a successful resolution that dissipates that violence, have been legislated out of public education. These include informal instances of communication, shared resources, and social debate, which



have disappeared as funding cuts to arts, physical education, clubs and activities, and recess time have reduced these opportunities.

Third, societal and educational expectations and policies that vilify students have become the norm rather than the exception in public education (Webber, 2003, p. 12). Schools routinely promote “an atmosphere of fear and mistrust among students by subjecting them to routine forms of monitoring and discipline, such as metal detectors, locker searches, dress codes, censorship of virtually any suspect median and popular culture, profiling, expulsion, and incarceration” (p. 12). These policies consistently set the expectations for a negative, hostile, and mistrusting environment of communication and education that is necessary in order for students to function on a daily basis within school (and societal) grounds.

Fourth, there is an obvious and disturbing lack of moral modeling inside and outside the school culture. Many teachers, administrators, school boards, and politicians consistently display a lack of responsibility and maturity when dealing with students and one another (p. 5). Sharing, empathy, and compassion have been replaced by indifference, punishment, and humiliation (p. 5). Basic psychology teaches about the concept of observational learning. To Webber, it is no surprise that “personalities are a reflection of the environment in which they are formed” (p. 149).

These factors - educational consumerism, a lack of conflict negotiation, harmful education policies, and a lack of positive models - have coalesced to formulate an environment that requires character in schools. Unfortunately, many educators believe that character formulation should be the work of parents and many parents believe that character is something that should be taught within the curriculum at schools (Webber, 2003, p. 151). The reality, as many developmental psychologists would likely support, is that successful development of children requires a consistent pattern of instruction and support at home and in schools. Therefore, not only does American society and education need to critically reflect upon the notions put forth by researchers and authors such as Webber, it also needs to provide some relevant and meaningful instruction that deals with character development in a positive and substantial fashion.

These 20th century influences led directly to the latest wave of character education that arose between the 1980s and 1990s. A series of large and successful private character education programs have marked this period of modern character education.

### ***Implications for Modern Character Education Programs***

There are numerous character education programs that have recently been incorporated into schools across America. Historically, the impetus for the waves of character programs that have risen in the United States has been one of societal frustration from a perceived lack of morals in American youth. The reemergence of character education as a specific curricular matter in public education today is consistent with what has occurred throughout the history of education in America. A variety of authors and researchers, including Lickona, Davis, and Cooley, have written about the waves of character education that have swept across the American educational landscape. Lickona (1993, p. 6-8), for example, wrote about the change of character education in the 1960s due to the strong movement to separate church and state. He then discussed how character education changed again in the 1970s as Kohlberg's moral reasoning became popular. Then, in the 1990s, character education changed again to include schools and communities in a broad discussion of values.

There are numerous popular character education programs in existence in the United States today, including the Heartwood Program, CharacterCounts!, and the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs. These programs are comprised of multiple components, are implemented into school settings in a variety of ways, and purport to have assessed themselves and found impressive results. It is extremely important to note that there is no broad-based set of peer-reviewed literature that has researched each program, or even an assessment of modern character education programs in general, in spite of the tens-of-billions of dollars that are being spent on character education programs in public education (Davis, 2006, p. 11). Although some states, including North Carolina and New York, have begun the process of defining and researching character education programs, there is much work to be done.

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