

# Character Shaping as an Integral Part of Education

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## Abstract

*Education being one of the greatest values developed by mankind has been reimagined, so that besides its initial aim to teach facts and figures it has acquired many shades. So education cannot be efficient and complete when it includes only academic skills.*

*The article attempts at revealing some concerns about how to use the process of education so that apart from academic skills students can get character shaping education; that is to say, to learn to think critically, shape right judgments on different issues, become more committed to moral actions, appreciate and create real values, etc.*

*The article also highlights the importance of selected materials used in English class which may enable a professional educator to include essential aspects of character education in the process of teaching academic skills.*

**Key words:** *teaching process, academic skills, character education, think critically, cultural and national identity, committed to moral actions*

## Introduction

*“Intelligence plus character - that is the goal of true education.”*

Martin Luther King J.

Throughout centuries people have reviewed, reevaluated and reinterpreted most of the values that have been obtained by the previous generations and in this sense education is not an exception. Education being a complicated and many-shaded process has always troubled advanced thinkers, political figures, educators who have for centuries been pondering over its purposes and consequences. Most of them unanimously endorse that along with developing academic skills students should acquire abilities to appreciate and create real values and beliefs in the process of being educated. They should have the opportunity to face the world as responsible, caring, and contributing individuals, ready to change the world for the better. For this they need appropriate character education which is synonymous to the character shaping and the instilling of real values.

Throughout history, there have been rises, declines and shifts in the commitment to character education but there has never been any rejection to its importance. As Lickona states “down through history, education has always had two great goals: to help people become smart and to help them become good” (Lickona 1992). True education means not only pursuing a certain

course of study but also fostering harmonious development of physical, mental, and spiritual powers in an individual. So the major purpose of education is to enhance the mind, to discover greater things, and to leave the world better for those who follow. Character education tends to develop the capacity of thinking clearly about moral issues and acting accordingly.

Unfortunately, from time to time, despite the acknowledgement of the importance of character education, the procedure of a lesson is relegated to simply teaching facts and figures ignoring the aspects of character shaping which is impermissible especially at higher educational institutions. It should certainly be remembered that education has potency to promote **national security** which is supposed to comprise the most cherished and carefully maintained values and beliefs (the right to preserving national and cultural identity, official religion, civil liberties and sanctity of institutions of governance, social welfare and national unity). Thus, it can truly be inferred that the way we educate the students that type of society we will live in future.

The issue of character education is something global and ample so the paper will concentrate on it as an accompanying aspect of teaching academic skills in English class. Character in the present article is accounted as the combination of dominant thoughts and actions.

### **Procedure of Applying Character Education in Class**

Character education or in another word ‘character shaping’ is not a case of delivering a lecture about what is good and what is bad, it is an elaborate and ongoing process the consequences of which can be seen not at once. Effective character education takes time, as Aaron Chalker attests but the results are well worth it (Chalker 2011).

Character can be developed as it comes from learned behaviour and this learning comes from both observation and interaction mainly with parents and educators. Character is actually designed and developed from and during relationships until they become ingrained. Character can be changed purposely in order to better get along in society. Character is the attitude and belief that one has towards life, work, family, society and motherland. Characters may be positive and negative, sometimes somewhere in between. There is a direct link between positive character and a happy and successful life. So one of the main objectives of educators is to develop positive attitude in students who will come up with concrete aims and desires to serve their country and community and change life for the better.

It is noteworthy mentioning that character shaping education was advocated by Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Dewey who understood that the purpose of education was to train good and virtuous citizens. Dewey framed a rich historical context when he wrote that, “It is a commonplace of educational theory that the establishing of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline” (Dewey 1916).

Educators as we are should include character education as a nonnegotiable and indiscernible element while teaching students academic competences. In the world that students enter as adults, there can be no either of academic or character competencies; students require both. In order to shape good character along with excellent academic skills it is essential that students have chance with the help and guide of teachers to review and reevaluate their opinions on universal morals and values such as:

- moral responsibility and behavior in society

Social and moral responsibility is one of the pre-requisites of character education. To underpin this sense it is vital to transmit certain values so that students can acknowledge the consequences of their actions and the impact of these actions on the society. Unfortunately educationalists have to support the development of social and moral responsibility without a certain framework on which to base this process. They have to act according to their initiative and own experience.

- self-respect and respect towards others

According to Oxford dictionary *self-respect* is *a proper sense of one's own dignity and integrity* and *respect* is *a feeling of deep admiration for someone or something elicited by their abilities, qualities, or achievements*. These two senses should be instilled in students as they are essential for character education and directly connected with each other; the more people respect others the higher their self-respect will be. The developing of these senses will also help students respect others' opinion and express their own points of view with dignity without being ashamed of them.

- pride in study and work process, feeling of self-worth

In the process of teaching educators should spare time to help students to build self-worth-feeling through evaluating each of their steps and undertakings. Students should eventually realize that study and work process is the most appreciated and expected period in their lives because they have the chance to store knowledge and experience which they may apply in life for the society's and their own prosperity. According to Brighouse, H, an education system is obliged to equip children to contribute to society with activities (tending a communal garden, coaching a kid's soccer team, caring for an elderly invalid) which are valuable for society and for those who engage in them as they derive a sense of self-worth from making such contributions. (Brighouse 2009)

- decent appreciation of national, cultural and worldwide values

It is common knowledge that education is aimed at multifaceted development of a human being but of course the study of national and cultural values makes students perfectly correlate in this international world preserving their own ones and respecting the other nations' achievements. But with the rise of technology and social networking, foreign culture is making increasingly

great impact on the development of a sense of national and cultural identity. Because of this, some young people have little understanding of their own culture, traditions and history which is disturbing.

### **Educators' Great Mission in English class**

The development of character and competence in students is essential because first of all, it will allow our country to exist and develop in the 21st century rather than be relegated to the fate of some countries which vanished from the face of the Earth the reason of which was not a failure of the economic or material aspect of the society, but rather the human, social and spiritual breakdown. Educators must be consistent in shaping character in students as future citizens who are to dispose the fate of the country. In this respect English class is unique. A deeper knowledge of the English language enables students to obtain a plenty of information and are supposed to learn a lot about the history of British Empire as one of the superpowers in the world, its rich cultural and scientific achievements, the social welfare its citizens enjoy and the UK's powerful political status in the world. This fact if left to chance may distort and detract students' awareness from their own national and cultural values. Without any expert guide students are prone to imitate or accept foreign values yielding to temptation. They are likely to start to underestimate their national and political values and morals which in its turn may undermine our nation-state. One shouldn't forget that language and culture lie in the core of identity so while teaching the English language and all other aspects correlated with it we as English instructors should be double alert in class. Information or materials used in class should be sorted out carefully so as not to contain facts which can juxtapose with students' opinion about their own national and cultural identity.

Professional educators should try to use the process of education to gently guide the students' thoughts when they express their opinions because in casual term, opinion is the result of a person's perception of morals, perspectives, particular feelings, beliefs, and desires. Thus, through students' opinions and thoughts it is possible to understand what they have in their minds and smoothly orient them. For effective and resolute thinking students need an instructor or a 'guide'. So as guides, English educators themselves should be a model for their students and provide the atmosphere of respect, trustworthiness and fairness in class. In this respect English lessons are relevant and fertile basis to discuss different themes through which it will be possible to reveal and underpin concepts about true morals and values. Discussions are also needed for students to develop communication skills in English. So there will be a link between English lesson plans that combine academic instructions and moral character development.

In order to include these aspects in the process of teaching English the educator needs to design the lesson and arrange the material in an appropriate way, stimulate students to express and speak out their ideas through so-called warm-up questions for discussions. The material for the lesson which is supposed to be mainly the textbooks is also of great importance. The textbooks are key components in English class so the materials inserted there should be selected with deep care and responsibility. After graduation along with academic skills students majoring in English are supposed to bear national dignity and take pride in being Armenians. In this respect part of the textbooks meant for Armenian students learning English should be compiled by Armenian authors in order to include texts about Armenian history, literature, architecture, music and art created throughout centuries. Most students possess this information in Armenian but not many in good English. Let's consider some extracts from the materials inserted in a textbook meant for Armenian students majoring in English for cross-cultural communication.

*The first significant state of the Armenian Highland was the highly advanced Kingdom of Ararat (with the capital in Tushpa, today's Van), better known after its Assyrian name Urartu (Ararat). The state was formed in the XI century BC and existed until the VII century BC. In 782 BC King Argishti I of Urartu founded the fortified city of Erebuni, which is today's Yerevan, the capital of Armenia.*

Not as many countries and cities in the world can record the history of that old so it is a case of taking pride in being an Armenian.

*In 405 Mesrop Mashtots returned to Armenia, bringing with him the **36 new letters** of the Armenian alphabet. The same year the Bible was translated anew and re-written in the new alphabet. The Armenian translation of the Bible, which contains more words than the Hebrew and Greek originals, was so perfect that it soon came to be known as the '**Queen of Translations**'.*

The passage displays Armenians' affection to their religion and literature at the same time providing a nice topic to discuss the concept of national and culture identity as religion is an integral part of culture.

*For centuries being at the edge of physical annihilation, Armenians nevertheless managed to preserve and develop their **national, religious and cultural identity**. Armenians successfully manifested themselves in **literature, architecture, painting, sculpture and music**. We Armenians were **the 10<sup>th</sup> nation** in the world to put our language in print. (Hambardzumyan, Sahakyan 7-14)*

So vividly does the extract demonstrate patriotism, tolerance, decisiveness, love for art and creation of eternal values that makes it contagious for future generations.

These passages will certainly evoke pride and self-confidence in Armenian students as when speaking to a foreigner they can convey that much of information about Armenia and Armenians in advanced English. The provided texts are also aimed at inculcating fundamental human values such as honesty, diligence, tolerance, frankness, punctuality, decisiveness, patriotism etc., which are integral and essential components of character education. They should all be embraced in the process of teaching so that every student through comprehensive knowledge can develop appropriate world outlook with distinct cultural and national values.

### **Conclusion**

Education must enable a man to become more efficient, determined and to achieve the goals of his life with ease. Due to versatile education students are able to sift and weigh evidence, differentiate the true from the false, the real from the unreal, and the facts from the fiction. The most dangerous person may be the man gifted with reason, but without morals and values. In order to somehow avoid having such future citizens in society students should enjoy excellence in the attainment of both character and academic competencies.

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