Character Education Interview

Ally Callihan

Liberty University

Part 1: Demographics

1) Full Name: Alexandra Hoffman
2) Role: History Teacher
3) Age of Students: High School
4) Date of Interview: 09/10/2019

Part 2: Interview

1) Tell me about character education in your classroom/school/district.

> "Our school is actively trying to incorporate more character education in the school and throughout the district overall. We have several resources available and linked online to some of our outreach programs and websites that are helpful. Caring for others is the basis of our community and we try to instill this in our youth. I personally try to exemplify an environment of self-respect along with valuing others' beliefs and ideas. I try to set the best example and keep my classroom open to all students, allowing them to foster the same dignity and respect for one another while learning. As I am a history teacher, it is important to listen to different opinions about events in the past that may be difficult for some to talk about. Staying consistent with this respect and valuing all individuals is key" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

2) In your opinion, is character education a new initiative for schools?

> "As I am still a relatively new teacher, I have always witnessed character education in schools while teaching, however, in general I believe character education is a fairly new initiative being brought into classrooms across the country. This is not something that was prevalent in my schools when growing up, so I would say it is fairly new, or at least is new to the area I am from" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

3) Do you believe character education should be left up to the family or church?

> "Although I believe character education is important in all aspects of life, which includes family and church life, I think schools and teachers can play a big role in a child's character development. I think it should not simply be left up to the student's family. Students also come from all different walks of life, so they may not always be receiving the best character influences and role models. Having character education in schools can allow these students to observe positive examples and gives them extra resources they may not have access to at home" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

4) What has been the reaction of parents and community members to character education programs?

"As there are many different families with diverse backgrounds and different levels of socioeconomic status, the reactions can be different. Some parents have no idea what programs and resources are available, and do not care to. Some are very involved and excited about what we have to offer and are grateful for the integration into school. It has been great to see the parents who are appreciative and enthusiastic about these programs and are involved with character education themselves. The community overall has been very supportive as well and welcomes these initiatives" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

5) Please tell me a little bit about any resistance you have found to character education.

"I have been blessed to work in a school with great and caring students. However, in any program there are individuals who may not be the most involved and show hesitancy towards group programs. Some students' lack of interest and participation is the biggest resistance I have seen. Overall, there has not been much resistance from parents in the community, which is a very positive response" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

6) Which types of programs or activities do you believe are most successful in promoting a sustained character education program?

"I find that programs that do not force activities and participation on the students can be most successful. It is extremely important that students have choices or else they may be resistant. Lack of choices in situations, especially for high school age students, I have noticed can cause students to become withdrawn and uninterested. I also think programs that are in general "cooler" or "less baby" for lack of a better phrase, can be more appealing to the high school age. Relating to the students about the tough stuff they are going through at this time (high school), including peer pressure, sex, bullying etc. can make the students feel more open to discussing problems in their community and the struggles they are dealing with. This can create even more respect between peers when they know what one another is going through" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

7) Which type of activities or programs do you feel are least successful?

"As mentioned, I think programs that students feel they are forced to participate in can become less effective and successful. Adolescents like to be seen as adults and do not want to be required to participate in something they do not believe in. Showing students what these programs include and fostering respect for them, in turn usually makes them want to show that same respect back" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

8) Are there any noticeable changes in student behavior or morale since you have started integrating character education?

> "As I already work in a school with exceptional students, I have been lucky enough to see them develop and grow with the utmost respect to their authority figures and peers. I do believe they are open to listening and working through the programs to the best of their abilities. I would say that in my experiences I have noticed a change in my students in caring more for one another. I think these programs can be very beneficial, but it would also be interesting to see how they work in other diverse schools and areas and other age groups" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

9) What words of wisdom, advice, or caution do you have regarding character education or integrating character into your classroom/curriculum?

> "I would say just make it fun. It is always important that students want to be learning about whatever you are teaching. It is also essential that you give students the same respect that you are asking of them. Teaching cannot be one sided or the students will withdraw even further. Lastly, I think just reiterating the importance of choices. Students should be given choices just like any other human is given. Allowing your students to have their own say in decisions is necessary, especially the older they get" (A. Hoffman, personal communication, September 10, 2019).

Part 3: Integrating Character Education in the Classroom

Character education has quickly become an important part of schools today. Similar to Ms. Hoffman, I did not experience many character education efforts in my schools when growing up. Now, working towards becoming a teacher myself, I see the importance of incorporating character education into the classroom. Some of the characteristics I find are important to incorporate include kindness and compassion for others, courage and creativity and finally respect. Compassion and kindness go hand in hand, and I believe they encompass what it means to have good character. Students should be taught to have compassion for one another and always be kind from an early age. Along with that, I think respecting others, whether they be an authority figure or another student, is necessary when trying to foster a positive learning environment. A. Hoffman (personal communication, September 10, 2019) said, "it is also

essential that you give students the same respect that you are asking of them", This respect should not be one-sided. Although we are becoming teachers, or authority figures, it is important to remember we are the example of good character qualities, and we should always display the attributes we are trying to instill in our students. As students should learn to be respectful and be respected, it is also important for children to be brought up where they are encouraged to be courageous and show their creativity at the same time.

There are different ways that a teacher can incorporate character education. A. Hoffman (personal communication, September 10, 2019) mentioned she likes to keep her lessons fun and engaging, while still giving her students the same respect and allowing them to share their ideas. I think this is good advice from her to make sure we are always allowing students to share their own ideas and not simply state our own. Allowing choices in instruction I found was successful when teaching special education, so this is another good piece of advice from her. No matter the age, students like to be given options and never forced into anything. In the text, Slavin and Schunk discuss the intentional teacher and effective strategies they use. One is that intentional teachers, "help students learn their own learning processes so they can learn more effectively" (Slavin & Schunk, 2017, p. 168). Another that I found to be important is that these teachers "use motivational strategies to encourage students to devote mental energy to learning" (Slavin & Schunk, 2017, p. 168). I think it is not only vital to help a student discover how they best learn and process, but especially important to always encourage and motivate the student to want to learn. When students fail, teachers should motivate them to try again, and this is what I hope to do in my classroom. I think motivating students to persevere even after failure will not only build greater self-efficacy in them but will also increase their confidence and optimism in learning.

Teachers can merge learning with character development through assignments. An example would be, "teachers choose reading assignments that captivate young readers and include characters who display ideal character traits" (Ferrara, 2019, p. 8). This could be great for me to incorporate into my lessons, as the children would not only be working on their reading skills but would simultaneously be learning about characters with good morals who they may want to imitate. I think combining character education with other subjects and lessons would be a very effective way to teach not only the subject matter but good values as well.

Part 4: Conclusion

From my readings and interview, I have found many positive outcomes of incorporating character education in schools. In a study done on three elementary schools, after a year of having character education incorporated, research found that all schools experienced an increase in positive behaviors and a decrease in discipline reports (Ferrara, 2019). However, the positive aspects do not come without limitations. A negative aspect to character education in the classroom is that teachers can not continue their work outside of school. These children come from very different backgrounds, as A. Hoffman (personal communication, September 10, 2019) stated, "As there are many different families with diverse backgrounds and different levels of socioeconomic status, the reactions can be different". Because these children have different family lives, it is hard to say if the methods being taught are carried out at home. When these programs are not followed through, they become less effective. "In order for a character education program to be effective, it must involve the entire faculty, staff, parents, and community" (Ferrara, 2019, p. 8). As found in the interview, Ms. Hoffman works in a school with a very supportive community and many helpful parents as well. This may be an indicator to why she feels the programs they are integrating have been successful.

Although some of these teachings may not be carried out at home, I still believe it is important to have character education in schools. It may be more successful with the support of churches, communities and family, but if a child does not have any of these role models in their life, they should be given this at school. I got into the education field not only to teach and educate students but to help those in need. The least I can do in my role in their lives is to lead as a good example and teach my students good character qualities along the way. Apart from a few limitations to character education in school, I believe it can have a positive impact on student's development and behavior. Education is not only about growing cognitively but developing socially and emotionally. Teachers should not only be teaching subject matter but should also be teaching life skills and social interaction. I believe these are some of the most important factors in an individual's life and students should have the opportunities to grow in these areas. I hope to instill these positive characteristics in my students one day.

I not only believe these qualities are important to have to be successful in school but in life as well. Students are learning and growing every day. As teachers, we can instill in them good qualities, regardless of the age we are teaching them at. When students have more respect for people, they can understand different opinions, listen to what they are told and effectively follow through in their work. When students are courageous and confident, they are more likely to pursue tasks that they have not mastered without fear of failure. When students are kind and compassionate to one another they can form impacting relationships with those around them which can lead to successful outcomes not only in school but in life as well.

References

Ferrara, K. M. (2019). *The effectiveness of character education on student behavior* (Master's thesis). Available from Rowan Digital Works.

Slavin, R. E., & Schunk, D.H. (2017). Learning theories: EDUC 500 (1st ed.). Boston, MA: Pearson. ISBN: 9781323786277.