



Character Education: The Seven C's to Success

by Dr. Arlene Kaiser

“You can’t teach character education in the public schools anymore. These days, they won’t let you bring in any moral values and parents aren’t teaching their kids at home!” Have you heard comments like this? I have. Do you believe this to be true? I don’t.

Whether our calling is in the public or Christian school, we have opportunities to teach character education. For the purpose of this article, my definition of “character education” includes the qualities aligned with the example and words of our Lord Jesus Christ. (2 Timothy 3:16)

The Bible is filled with illustrations and teachings of a moral code that includes integrity, responsibility, respect, trust, kindness, compassion, credibility, and courage, just to name a few. Furthermore, numerous groups that offer programs to teach character education for both profit and non-profit organizations. You only need to search the Internet for “character education” and a plethora of programs will appear which support the positive qualities we espouse as Christians.

Mary Akey, Christian life coach, speaker, and author of *Seven Steps to a Transformational Heart* states, “Your belief system is what you say. Your value system is what you live. When they are totally congruent is when you are totally centered in Christ.”

How do we move from a belief system to living our values and teaching them in the schools? Here are seven C-words to move in that direction.

Christ (Romans 12:2 Ephesians 4:23)

Many years ago a friend confronted and challenged me when she said, “In the last ten years I’ve known you, you haven’t changed as a Christian.” At first I thought this was a compliment until I asked for clarification. She gently explained that she hadn’t seen any growth or change in my character. And she was right. I was not growing as a Christian. Christianity was my sporadic attendance at a church and wearing a cross. Over the years, I have learned that being a Christ- follower involves growing in Christ, and it isn’t always easy!

In the past, I was often guilty of repeating the hopelessness of our world and yielding to the negativity of a lack of character education. We are called to be lights on a hill. We can promote character education in what we do and say, after all, children are watching and listening.

Code (Matthew 5:19)

What is the Code of Conduct in your classroom or school? When I taught drama in the public junior high school, my classroom contract stated that profanity was not allowed. One day, a student used a curse word while performing a comedy scene with another

student. The entire class immediately zoomed their attention to me as to my reaction. I calmly watched the completion of their scene, positively acknowledged the good points of their creative effort and gently asked the one student to meet me in the back of the classroom.

I sensed that the student had not used profanity to shock or show-off. I was puzzled and yet I knew I had to take action, as all of the eyes of the students were on me like a laser beam. I asked him to explain why he spoke inappropriately and broke the classroom contract. He looked at me perplexed and said, "I didn't know that was one of the words we couldn't use in here."

What a shame it would have been if I had just sent him to the principal with a referral. Your students come from so many different lifestyles and backgrounds. You cannot assume they will always know what is appropriate and what isn't.

Chronicle (Matthew 13:34)

Tell stories which chronicle a moral. One of my "teaching moments" included my experience of being so desperate to get a college degree that I succumbed to an elaborate scheme of cheating. The end result was that I was overwhelmed with guilt and shame as well as the fear of being found out. I confessed my actions to the department chair with the potential of being expelled looming in my future. As a consequence, I not only had to repeat the course but attend summer school as well. But the most painful outcome was the humiliation of facing my parents and peers. Such stories often open the door to authenticity and give students an opportunity to fearlessly connect with their teacher.

From time to time, it seems that crime does pay. As an assignment, encourage students to keep a journal or narrative of the media documenting the consequences of individuals who broke the law and were caught years later and are convicted of their crime whether it be falsifying information, forging credentials, embezzling money, or cheating in school. Through the storytelling (chronicle) of a moral decision, non-engaged children and teens become enthralled as the final outcome of justice is unraveled.

Collaborating and Connecting with the Community (Proverbs 2)

The community can be a powerful resource for character education. The chamber of commerce, service organizations and churches can often make recommendations of community members willing to participate in interviews, panels, dialogues, discussions, and conferences with a focus on moral codes in the work place.

Coaching (James 1:5-8)

Sometimes just coaching a student to do some investigative research on their own can teach powerful lessons. Marshall, a junior in high school and talented guitarist, wanted to become a professional musician. His dilemma was whether to move to Los Angeles immediately after high school and follow his passion, or first attend college at the urging of his mother. His late father had performed with various rock bands in Los Angeles during his era.

Upon learning that Marshall's father had played professionally with some well known bands and had remained friends with some of the musicians still working in Los Angeles,

a teacher encouraged him to email the friend of his late father for advice. The email (to which I added the scriptures and character descriptions) was promptly answered and included the following excerpts, which were encouraging to Marshall, his mother, and his teacher:

1. Play with everyone you can. Try and play with people that are better as it will make you better.
2. You will need to support yourself, as the playing itself does not always pay well. If you can earn money, whether it be in the music field somehow or outside of it and this lets you spend time playing, great, but you need to be able to support yourself. (Responsibility)
3. Don't let anyone tell you that you can't do this or that. It is not easy at times, but we all know the joy that comes from playing. (Persistence)
4. Stay away from the drugs and alcohol stuff. There is not one long-term success story that is built on this. Plenty of failures and negative stuff comes from this.
(Romans 6:16)
5. We all want to be rock stars, but a big key is never giving up. This is sort of a life thing, as well. But remember that you need to take care of yourself, as well. I didn't get married and have kids till I was much older, as I knew I wanted to chase the dream and could not do it 100% if I needed to support a family. I am not saying not to get married, just keep this in mind. Being a full time musician can sometimes be very lonely. (Persistence, Integrity, Reliability)
6. I know this will sound funny, but always be nice and respectful of everyone. You never know when you will run into them again. The music business is very small and everyone knows everyone. Interesting story. I am doing clinics and one of the main guys is a fan as he saw my bands when he was a kid. Now what would have happened if at one of those gigs I treated this little kid like garbage, ignored him or refused to give him a stick or autograph? People don't forget, especially when their heroes turn out not to be what they think. (Philippians 4:5)

A postscript was included stating that Marshall could contact his father's friend throughout his musical journey.

According to the Josephson Institute (www.josephsoninstitute.org), National Character Counts Week is celebrated October 19 – 25. As Christians, we are privileged to celebrate our newness in Christ daily. May we consider the seven C's in striving for success in teaching Character Education: (1) Christ (2) Code of Conduct (3) Chronicle the journey (4,5,6,) Collaborate and Connect with our Community and (7) Coaching. The journey is a challenge, and perhaps more so for those in public education, but with our obedience to God, we cannot fail.

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