

Enhancing Character Education for Tomorrow's Teacher, Today: A Connected Learning Partnership Model

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In the past few years, educational advocates, parents, educators and policy makers have expressed their concern over a national trend in the increase and prevalence of student antisocial behavior such as aggression, criminal activity and violent acts, while noticing a decline in positive character qualities (e.g., altruism, civic responsibility, and democratic values) (Stallions, 2001; Berman, 2000; Viadero, 2002). For example, in 2001 the National Center for Education Statistics reported that nearly 2.5 million crimes were committed on school grounds against students by students between the ages of 12 and 18. This paper details an initiative undertaken by Barry University professors to meet the growing need to cultivate in our nation's children basic core values such as compassion, respect, responsibility and integrity through teacher preparation. The Connected Learning Community Center (CLCC) model is the driving force behind this initiative.

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behaviors frequently are formed outside the school, but are reinforced in the classroom, especially by teachers who lack the knowledge and expertise to address student disciplinary actions (Jones & Stoodley, 1999; Ryan & Bohlin, 1999; Wayne & Ryan, 1997).

There is growing consensus that antisocial behavior can decline and in some cases be prevented through interventions such as programs linking character development and positive social behaviors (Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998). In a recent education Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Poll, three-quarter of adults responding to the survey cited lack of student discipline as a “very serious” or “somewhat serious” issue impacting K-12 education (Rose & Gallup, 2000). While these interventions may offer strategies to teachers in how to engage students in dealing with undesired actions, teachers often do not have the knowledge, skills or disposition to effectively implement such approaches (Wayne & Walberg, 1985; Nucci, 2001). In part this can be attributed to a lack of exposure or opportunity to explore character education in depth as part of their teacher education programs (Fine, 1995; DeRoche & William, 2001).

Since teachers share a greater responsibility in the affective development of their students, it is vital that teacher education programs incorporate rigorous programmatic changes by infusing character education components addressing children’s overall social, emotional, and cognitive development (Coles, 1997; Cohen, 2001; Nucci, 1998). Such programmatic changes will result in teachers who can teach, model and foster ethical, responsible, and caring students, by connecting character education and academics to “real world” experiences (Stallions, 2001; Ryan & Boblin, 1999).

While infusing character education in teacher preparation is a key component in the development of positive character traits among young people, the role and impact of family and community must also be recognized. The prevalence of disrupted and trouble families has deprived many children of positive socialization opportunities. Therefore, efforts must be made to restore and assist parents/families as primary teachers of character and moral development (Yeatts, 1990; Billig, 2000). By building partnerships, teachers can expand character education beyond the classroom and engage home and the community in promoting good character and civic responsibility (Billing, 2000; Jones & Stoodley, 1999). Thus, effective character education requires that preservice teachers acquire the theoretical and practical knowledge and skills for the application of character education in classrooms, schools, and communities, from inservice teachers continued professional and personal growth as well as skills development, and from families and communities active participation in supporting and promoting moral development through modeling, mentoring and acknowledgment that good character development is a communal responsibility (Cohen, 2001; Jones & Stoodley, 1999).

Population growth by ethnic or racial group is projected to grow tremendously, between the years 2000 and 2010. In the nation's 32 largest public school systems, minorities constitute 75% of the student population (NASBE, 1991). At a national level, minority students are projected to increase to more than 35% by 2010 (American Association of Colleges for Teacher Education, 1990). Meeting the educational needs of such diverse student population has prompted departments of education and colleges and universities with teacher education programs to increase training/educational opportunities addressing (a) diversity awareness, (b) development and implementation of

“culturally sensitive” curricula, and (c) to expand professional collaborative opportunities for preservice and inservice teachers (FDOE, 1999). Thus, effective character education must also address diverse learners and offer pre and inservice teachers the opportunity to infuse culturally sensitive character education into their curriculum. Classrooms become a more caring, respectful and inclusive community of learners when teachers establish effective character education programs (Kagan, 2001),

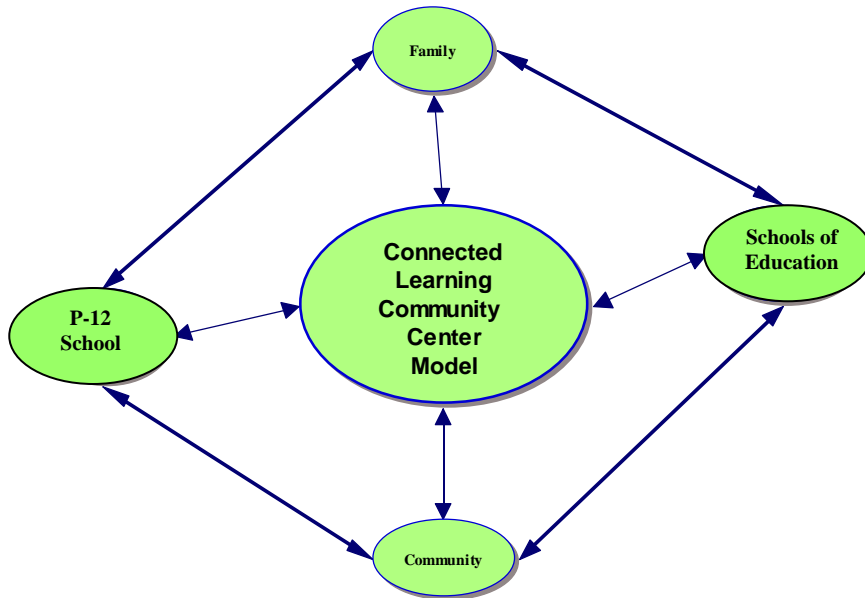
Enhancing Character Education for Tomorrow’s Teachers, Today is an initiative undertaken by Barry University professors, Dr. Maria E. Stallions and Dr. Karol L. Yeatts to meet the growing need to cultivate in our nation’s children basic core values such as compassion, respect, responsibility and integrity through teacher preparation. The Connected Learning Community Center (CLCC) model is the driving force behind this initiative.

The CLCC model conceptual framework (Figure 1) is based on a collaborative and innovative approach to promote and achieve the following four goals through a seamless reciprocal process linking P-12 schools, home, community, and teacher preparation programs:

- Create, implement, and sustain opportunities for preservice teachers, P-12 students, inservice teachers, and parents to advance character education.
- Increase, improve and sustain the quality, diversity, and quantity of character education curriculum resources.
- Develop, promote, and sustain character education teaching and learning opportunities through family and community involvement.

- Expand, enhance, and sustain collaborative character education research and dissemination efforts.

Figure 1



The CLCC model will achieve these goals through preservice teacher education programmatic changes, through research and training, and through the development of a collaborative character education infrastructure. These partnerships will create and sustain teaching and learning communities that will advance character education and positively contribute to the educational needs of all P-12 students. The CLCC model can potentially have a far reaching impact on teacher preparation programs particularly among those institutions preparing classroom practitioners serving large urban settings.

As a character education teacher preparation model, CLCC is designed to provide preservice teacher with the theoretical and practical knowledge as well as skills necessary for the application of character education in teaching and learning through curriculum integration, assessment, program evaluation, as well as the development of family,

school, and community partnerships. This comprehensive framework allows for the infusion of course specific content and assignments addressing each of the following topics: educational pedagogy, caring environments, ethical practices, family involvement, thinking critically, taking action, civic responsibilities and teaching values.

Preservice teachers demonstrate character education competencies through a process of *inquiry, reflection, action* and *demonstration*. Each of these areas offer teacher candidates an opportunity to develop and articulate his/her character education philosophical position statement, design and implement character education instructional units that demonstrate knowledge of well-established human development/learning theories (physical, social, emotional, moral, cognitive, cultural, linguistic, and experiential) and include both traditional and alternate assessment techniques. Additionally, preservice teachers engage in coursework intentionally prepared to elicit answers to questions related to societal needs. For example, academic service-learning projects are designed to cultivate professional and personal values such as respect for others, collaboration and team building, development of effective communication strategies, use of democratic principles in the classroom, and opportunities to reflect and evaluate the outcomes of working with students, peers, families and community members. Imbedded in these projects is the understanding that linking course content to the real needs of children, families and community, places a moral claim in the formation and development of educational practitioners.

The vision of CLCC is to transform character education into a seamless reciprocal process linking students, families, community members, and educators through a shared vision of leadership, scholarship, innovative exemplary practices and a commitment to

develop in our preservice teachers and young people habits of character that will positively contribute to the continuation of our democratic values. CLCC will fulfill its vision and goals through teacher education course infusion of character education components, through collaborative partnerships, through opportunities for research and training, by strengthening character education infrastructure.

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