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"Role of Standards in our Spiritual Journey"

CHARACTER EDUCATION – THE URGENT NEED, SCOPE AND CURRICULUM

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*Character Education and focused moral teaching-**Tahdrib** and **Akhlaq**- are an essential component in teaching the true message of Islam, and linking **Aqidah** with action. Belief and ritual worship without moral behavior and good character are worthless.*

The Prophet (S) was asked: "What is the religion?" He (S) replied: "The religion is morality." When asked "What is woe (or affliction)?" He (S) replied, "Real affliction is lack of morality."

On the Day of Judgment, morality will be weighed more heavily than anything else. Those whose morals are weak and deeds are slight will be judged accordingly.

The Prophet (S) said: 'Nothing that will be weighed on the Day of Judgment will weigh heavier than moral action."

-Abu Da'ud and Tirmidhi

CHARACTER EDUCATION-THE URGENT NEED, SCOPE AND CURRICULUM.

Character Education is the intentional, proactive effort to instill students with important core, ethical values. The values are those most likely to be branded as "universal" and range from good judgment and self discipline to honesty, integrity, and compassion, among others. As Dr. Thomas Lickona, author of *Educating for Character*, states, "Moral education is not a new idea. It is, in fact, as old as education itself. Down through history, in countries all over the world, education has had two great goals: to help young people become smart and to help them become good." Character Education centers around the concept that good character is not formed automatically, but rather is developed over time through a sustained process of teaching, example, learning, and practice – it is developed through character education.

The intentional teaching of good character is particularly important in today's society since our youth face many opportunities and dangers unknown to earlier generations. They are bombarded with many more negative influences through the media and other external sources prevalent in today's culture. Further, with the prevalence of an increasingly interconnected society, the negative influences reach them from various venues at rapid speeds. At the same time, there are many more day-to-day pressures impinging on the time that parents and children have together. Studies show that children spend only 38.5 minutes a week (33.4 hours a year) in meaningful conversation with his or her parents, while they spend 1,500 hours watching television.[1] With this type of moral reinforcement lacking at home and with children spending close to 900 hours a year in school, it is essential that schools resume a proactive role in assisting families and communities by developing caring, respectful environments where students learn core, ethical values.

Victor Battistich of the University of Missouri-St. Louis examined 15 years of scientific research on this very subject, concluding that "comprehensive, high quality character education" can prevent a wide range of problems, including "aggressive and antisocial behaviors, drug use, precocious sexual activity, criminal activities, academic underachievement and school failure." [2]Although character education has always been of vital importance, schools have strayed from proactive efforts to incorporate character development into their curricula in past decades. Ironically, this neglect came at a time when the need became greater due to increased challenges in raising children. Toward the end of the 20th century, great reflection was spawned after a general weakening in guidance by some families and communities. The tragedy at Columbine and other fatal shootings at a number of schools punctuated these concerns across the country. As a result of the increased visibility of such issues, character education is increasingly becoming a priority in our nation's education reform. Many at the forefront of such reform are recognizing that character development must be an intentional part of education rather than simply a natural process.

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[1] American Family Research Council, 1990 and Harper's, November, 1999

[2] What can schools do?-by Charles C. Haynes and Marvin W. Berkowitz-USA TODAY.)

Acceptance of Islam and being a Muslim carries an obligation to be the best human being one can be by following the example of Prophet Mohammad (S). As educators, it is our obligation to foster social, ethical, moral and emotional development of young people along with academic development. It is critical to create schools that simultaneously foster character development and promote learning. In fact, character education promotes academic excellence and helps students develop academic responsibility, resulting in optimum learning and fewer disciplinary problems.

To be most effective, character education must include the entire school community and must be infused throughout the entire school's mission and culture, not solely its curriculum. Character education promotes core values in all phases of academic life and includes proactive strategies and practices to help children understand moral principles as well as how to act upon them.

According to Lickona, a comprehensive approach to character education results in schools creating a positive moral culture and developing a total school environment that supports the values taught in the classroom. This is accomplished through the leadership of the principal, school faculty, and staff. Subsequently, a sense of community results and expands such values into other realms of extracurricular life, offering opportunities to address moral concerns beyond their typical confines. The school is then able to recruit parents and community members as partners in fostering their value system beyond the classroom. These members of the broader community serve as role models allowing the students to learn by example.

Teachers act as caregivers, models and mentors, treating students with love and respect, setting a good example for them, supporting social behavior, and correcting hurtful actions. They subsequently create a moral community, helping students respect and care about each other, ensuring that students feel valued within the group. Teachers create a democratic classroom environment, where students are involved in decision-making. They practice moral discipline, using the creation and application of rules as opportunities to foster moral reasoning, self-control, and respect for others. It is through their instruction that they are able to teach values by using academic subjects as a vehicle for examining ethical values. They encourage moral reflection through reading, writing, discussion, decision-making exercises, and debate, teaching conflict resolution in order to help students learn to resolve conflicts in fair, non-violent ways.

Schools of character have one thing in common: a school-wide commitment to nurturing the "whole" child. They develop students not only academically, but also socially and ethically by infusing character development into every part of their curriculum and culture. Specifically, schools committed to character education explicitly name and publicly stand for specific core values, promulgating them to all members of the school community. They define their values in terms of behaviors that can be observed in school life and model, study, and discuss those values. This then allows them to use them as the basis for all human relations in the school and create consistent standards of conduct for their school community.

Formalized character education begins when members of a school, along with the broader community, come together to determine the core ethical values that they share, using that as the basis for educational standards in their respective school. These values then become the foundation for all that the school does – curriculum, teaching strategies, school culture, extra-curricular activities, and the like.

Character education does not add work to a teacher's workload, but integrates values into the curriculum in a "grade appropriate" and "age appropriate" manner. Further, it does not manifest itself in a particular discipline, but is in all subjects and content areas. Teachers report that implementation of character education results in less disciplinary and behavioral problems. * Character education should take place throughout the entire school day. Administrators, teachers, and other faculty and staff must serve as models and teach positive character traits. Character education should not be relegated to a "character education class" that is conducted periodically, but should be infused throughout the structures and processes of the entire school curriculum and culture.

Character Education spans any particular mold of what the ideal school ought to be. It has been successful throughout various schools nationwide and is broadening its scope with every passing day. Based on the implementation of character education across the nation, the [3]Character Education Partnership (CEP) has garnered expert advice and created Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education to serve as guidelines for effective, comprehensive character education.

1. Promotes core ethical values as the basis of good character. Again, seeing as each school has its own unique mission and culture, each school must define these values, model them, and study and discuss them based on their own needs and desires. However, the schools must also use their value system as the basis of all interactions in the school, celebrate the manifestation of such interactions, and hold all school members accountable to the standards of conduct consistent with their core principles.
2. Teaches students to understand, care about, and act upon these core ethical values. A holistic approach to character development seeks to develop the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral aspects of moral life. Students are taught to understand and care about the core values by studying and discussing them, observing behavioral models, and resolving problems involving the values.
3. Encompasses all aspects of the school culture. All aspects of the curriculum- be they academic, social, or extra-curricular- and all interaction within the school among all members of the school community should be used as teachable opportunities for character education.
4. Fosters a caring school community. A school committed to character becomes a microcosm of a civil, caring, and just society. This involves developing caring relationships among students (within and across grade levels) as well as between staff and families. These caring relationships foster both the desire to learn and the desire to be a good person.
5. Offers opportunities for moral action. In the ethical as in the intellectual domain, students are constructive learners and learn best by doing. To develop good character students need many opportunities to apply the moral and ethical values they have been taught. This may manifest itself in everyday interactions and discussions as well as community service. Repeated moral experiences develop skills and behavioral practices that make up the "action" side of character.
6. Supports academic achievement. The program should include a meaningful and challenging academic curriculum that respects all learners, develops character,

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[3] Character Education Partnership (CEP)

and helps all students succeed. Success gives students a sense of competence and makes them feel valued and cared about as persons. "Character connections" should be made between academic content and the character qualities they wish to develop.

7. <u>Develops intrinsic motivation.</u> The goal of the character education curriculum should aim at developing the students' understanding of the core values, and their awareness of how their behavior affects others. It should strive to build strength of character, which will lead to positive manifestations of the core values in the future.

8. <u>Includes whole-staff involvement.</u> The program should engage all the school staff-teachers, administrators etc. as a learning and moral community that shares responsibility for character education and attempts to adhere to the same core values that guide the education of its students.

9. <u>Requires positive leadership of staff and students</u>. The school that is engaged in effective character education must have leaders who champion the effort, providing long range support for such endeavors. The school students should assume developmentally appropriate roles in leading the character education program through class meetings, student government, peer mediation, service clubs, and other student initiated projects.

10. <u>Involves parents and community members.</u> The school should communicate all components and activities of the Character Education Program with families regularly via newsletters, e-mails, parent conferences and school/family programs. Parents could be members of an Advisory Committee for planning, implementation, and monitoring the program.

11. <u>Assesses results and strives to improve.</u> The effective character education must include an effort to assess progress through the character of the school, the school staff's growth as character educators, and the extent to which students manifest good character.

<u>Salam School Character Education Curriculum.</u>

Salam School, an Islamic school located in Milwaukee, is a K through eighth grade school community with over four hundred students, and a fifty member staff and teaching faculty. Salam School integrated a Character Education Curriculum into its school along with its regular academic and extracurricular programs. The curriculum contains several core values which are universally accepted as being essential to good character and moral behavior .The curriculum has an initial component which defines Morality, and a final segment which teaches Reflection, Resolution, and Change in building good character.

Each month, Salam School takes one core value and incorporates it into all subjects and content areas taught throughout the school, in all grade levels. The value is taught and incorporated in the form of reading and writing assignments, as well as discussions, projects; and reflected in bulletin boards all over the school. The lesson plans are required to elaborate how the value will be taught and reinforced. For example- Islamic Studies teachers teach the value with references from the Quran,

Hadith, Seerah and lives of the Sahabah.The Arabic teachers cover the Quranic ayat referring to the value and explain the Quranic injunctions to support and exhort development of the moral value. Social studies teachers reinforce the value with examples of people from history and events that demonstrate the manifestation or lack of a particular value. We have a daily morning assembly for all the students and staff in which the value of the month is reinforced through Dua, hadith and recognition of students or staff who displayed the value.

Another school wide activity to promote development of good character and morals was a Salam School Hijra project. The students had an Art Contest for the Hijri /Gregorian calendar they created. The theme of the calendar was -'Ideal Muslim'. Each month represented one characteristic or value of an 'Ideal Muslim' supported by an Ayah from the Quran. Each grade illustrated one characteristic of an ideal Muslim. We invited some members of our community to judge the drawings and they picked winners from each grade. We selected 12 drawings for the calendar according to the best representation of the core value or characteristic that should be displayed by an 'Ideal Muslim'.
The students held bake sales to raise money to print the calendar .The calendar was in full color and had the Hijri and Gregorian dates. The students sold the calendar and the proceeds were donated to help needy members in the Milwaukee community.

The Salam School Character Education Curriculum has three main aspects-

1. Essential questions-What do we want the students to learn about the core value and all its related manifestations and derivatives?

2. Skills-What skills do we want the students to develop and achieve?

3. Assessment- What methods, activities and strategies are we going to use to measure success in terms of students manifestation of the value and good character?

The following are the eleven components and core values of the Salam School Character Education Curriculum. The detailed curriculum for each segment with the essential questions, skills and assessments are explained after the list of components and values.

- Morality
- Respect
- Good Judgment
- Self Discipline and Control
- Honesty, Integrity, Trust and Courage.
- Perseverance and Diligence
- Compassion, Kindness, Caring and Generosity.
- Friendship, Loyalty, Cooperation and Love.
- Justice, Equality, Fairness and Acceptance.
- Service and Volunteerism-Giving of yourself.
- Reflection, Resolution and change to build good character.

Salam School Character Education Curriculum.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESSMENT
MORALITY	What is good character? What are morals? How are moral codes universal? What is appropriate behavior? What are appropriate manners? How is morality linked to self – discipline? What is a good role model & mentor? How would you discern & set your own standards of morality despite changes of morality in society? What is social measure? What is human dignity? What is humility? How does morality & good behavior make you a productive citizen?	Develop good character. Learn to be a moral person. Learn appropriate manners. Learn that good morals are universal for all people. Learn to combat negative social pressure. Learn to be truly humble. Learn to be truly dignified.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with writing or art to explain learning and understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation. Investigate morality displayed by individuals throughout history.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS.	SKILLS	ASSESSMENT
RESPECT	What is respect? What is caring? What is respect for your self? What is respect for others? What is respect for others feelings? What is respect for property? What is respect for authority & law? What is respect for rules & procedure? What is respect for the environment? What is respect for animals? What is respect for plants? What is respect for birds? How would you incorporate this in your daily life?	Building Good Character. Recognizing appropriate behavior. Affirm human dignity. Learn tolerance. Recognize human differences. Observe role models & follow their ways. Make good choices towards self, others, environment, animals, birds & plants.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with art & writing to explain understanding values. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESSMENT
GOOD JUDGMENT	What is judgment? What are choices & how do you make them? What are decisions & how do you make them? What are consequences? How do your actions affect yourself & others? What is empathy? What is a problem? How would you solve it? What are feelings? How do you express feelings? (positive & negative) What is anger? What is anger management? What is violence and vandalism? How is good judgment related to safety? How would you be responsible in your choices & decisions?	Building good character. Understanding empathy. Making good, positive choices. Making good, positive decisions. Understanding consequences result from choices & judgment. Realize accountability & responsibility for decisions & judgment. Recognize feelings. Deal with feelings.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Feeling activity. Individual, group or class art & writing project to explain the understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESSMENT
SELF DISCIPLINE & CONTROL	What is self-discipline? What is self-control? What does controlling your thoughts mean? How would you express your thoughts? What does controlling your actions mean? What are goals? What would you consider when you make them? (realistic vs. far fetched) What are the steps to reach goals? What is extravagance & miserliness? What is balance & how would you achieve it? What is greed & gluttony? How would you achieve success? How would you attain self-discipline & self-control?	Building good character. Learning self-discipline. Learning self-control. Learning actions have consequences. Learn to make and reach goals. Have balance & achieve it.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class art & writing project to show understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESSMENT
HONESTY, INTEGRITY, TRUST & COURAGE	What is honesty? What is integrity? What is meant by trust & trustworthiness? What is a mistake? Who makes mistakes? What is cheating & how do people cheat at home, school & in general? How do we earn a person's trust? What is a promise? How would you hold yourself accountable? What is a lie? What is a conscience? How do you recognize your inner voice? What is courage?	Building good character. Being honest. Developing integrity. Be trustworthy. Adhere to rules at home, school & in the community. Learn the significance of promises. Not being afraid to tell the truth. Learn accountability. Build a strong conscience. Not cheating. Being courageous.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project using art & writing to explain the understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESSMENT
PERSEVERANCE & DILIGENCE	What is motivation? What is perseverance? What is hard work? What is diligence? What is effort? What is failure? What is true success? What steps would you take to achieve success? What is self – actualization? What are positive & negative ways to deal with success? What is frustration & how do you deal with it? What rewards (tangible & intangible) would you achieve through perseverance?	Learn to work hard. Importance of hard work. Learn lessons through perseverance & diligence. Learn tolerance. Learn patience. Learn self – discipline. Learn how to deal with frustration & failure. Learn to introspect, reflect & self correction. Learn value of tangible & intangible rewards. Learn how to deal with success. Learn how to recognize your potential.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with art or writing to explain the understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESMENT
COMPASSION, KINDNESS, CARING & GENEROSITY	What is compassion? What is kindness? What is caring? What is generosity? What is meant by empathy & sympathy? Who is deserving of compassion? How would you behave towards people with physical & mental impairment? Who are the elderly in society and what is our responsibility towards them? Who is a refugee & what are their needs? What do people of different faiths believe about generosity? What is the generation gap?	Learn compassion. Learn kindness. Learn to care. Learn to give of yourself & your belongings. Learn to sympathize & empathize. Learn acceptance. Learn to care for the elderly in society. Learn the affect after natural disaster & war. Learnt that generosity is universal. Understand the generation gap.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with art or writing to show understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation. Visit a retirement home & write a reflection paper after visit. Research & present a study of present day refugees all over the world and do a drive to help alleviate some of their needs.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESMENT
FRIENDSHIP, LOYALTY, CO-OPERATION & LOVE.	What is friendship? What is co – operation? Who is a companion? What is a team & team work? What is synergy? What is consultation? What is a disagreement? What is a compromise? What is conflict resolution? How could you disagree with your friends & remain friends after? Who is an ideal friend? What are the ingredients for a true & lasting friendship? What is meant by control in a relationship? What is peer – pressure? How would you deal with peer – pressure? What is love? What is loyalty?	Learn about true friendship. Learn co – operation. Learn to work in a group. Learn effective communication. Learn about active listening. Learn to combat negative peer pressure. Learn the limits in a relationship. Learn the different dimensions of love & emotional boundaries. Learn to enjoy & support good, forbid & stand against wrong in a relationship.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with art and writing to explain the understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation. Research paper on negative influence of peer pressure (sex, drugs, alcohol and smoking)

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESMENT
JUSTICE, EQUALTIY, FAIRNESS & ACCEPTANCE	What is justice? What is equality? What is fairness? What is acceptance? What is tolerance? What is diversity & what are the advantages of it? What is difference & how would you reconcile difference? What are bigotry, hate & racism? What is segregation & integration in society?	Learn to be just. Learn to be fair. Learn to treat others as you would want to be treated. Learn to recognize difference & learn to draw from their strength. Learn to be different & yet stand together. Learn team work. Learn to accept an individual for who they are & what they have to offer.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with art & writing to explain the understanding of the value. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation. Put together multi – cultural program.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESMENT
SERVICE & VOLUNTEERISM – GIVING OF YOURSELF	What is social awareness? What is global awareness? What is social justice? What are civil liberties & rights? What is social work? How can we be of service to others? Who is a volunteer & what are their responsibilities? Why would an individual choose to volunteer? What is work ethic –in paid & volunteer positions? What is commitment? What is obligation? What is self – satisfaction? What is giving & what are the different types of giving? What qualities do you need to be a successful volunteer?	Learn about global issues. Learn how one person can make a difference in a global issue. Learn about social justice. Learn about civil liberties & rights. Learn how to be a successful volunteer. Promote the spirit of volunteerism.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Individual, group or class project with art & writing to explain how they can make a difference in Global issues. Peer evaluation. Self evaluation. Community service. Hands on school project or Volunteer activity. Do a research project on a present day or historical character who exhibited volunteerism.

VALUE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	SKILLS	ASSESMENT
REFLECTION, RESOLUTION & CHANGE TO BUILD GOOD CHARACTER	What is reflection? What is resolution? What is true repentance? What is self – correction? What is survival? What is change? How would you integrate values into your daily life to build good character?	Learn to examine self & elect change. Integrate good values into your daily life & improve character.	Ongoing observation. Role playing. Reflection log with all values represented to show understanding of the values learned. Self evaluation. Peer evaluation. Peer mediation.

CONCLUSION

Good character and manifestation of superior morals is the most effective form of outreach and Dawah we can practice to convey the message of Islam.The character of our beloved Prophet Mohammad (S) was the greatest testimony for the truth of his (S) message. Our   conscious   effort to teach and exemplify good moral behavior will help us to emulate our beloved Prophet Mohammad (S) who stated: "Verily, I have been sent to perfect morals."