

Synopsis of 2017 Journal of Character Education's Article

Research out of Cal Berkley points to more comprehensive, systematic approach for successful Character Development

To be most effective and truly achieve long-term, sustainable outcomes, character development needs to be viewed in holistic, integrated way. Too often the study of character is being reduced to the study of a limited number of specific traits – e.g., grit, civility, growth-mindset, etc. While these individual traits are not unimportant, there is a great deal more to character development than simply one or two attributes. In scholarly research coming out of Cal Berkley (see Nucci, 2017), character development should be viewed in a systematic way – that is, character is best developed in a unified, interconnected system in which multiple factors work together to bring about the greatest impact for student success.

Nucci (2017) argues that character is not a collection of virtues or personality traits, but a system (i.e., “Relational Developmental System” or “RDS”) that enables a person to engage the world as a moral agent. Nucci maintains that this system must be contextual and coherent and includes moral development, moral education, social and emotional learning, and character formation.

Nucci says that successful character initiatives require a systematic approach that consist of “interrelating partial structures that inform and impact one another in contexts” (Nucci, 2017).

We must examine all components of character in a comprehensive way, for it is a “mistake to assume a decontextualized psychological system that has little to do with the actual human being” (Nucci, 2017).

Educational experts have long argued that one size doesn't fit all and hence the need to engage young people with differentiated instruction. In this spirit, the best teachers have deployed multiple approaches and strategies that work together in a universal way to create very dynamic, high impact classrooms and schools. It is with this same logic that we must conceptualize the overall field of character development. To achieve the greatest possible results for the greatest number of students, we need a multifaceted approach to character. Creating a culture and climate of character that accounts for an expansive range of student experiences is the way to foster sustained character growth for young people.

Reference:

Nucci, L. (2017). A Multifaceted Developmental System. *Journal of Character Education*, 13 (1).