Character Education in the Prevention of School Violence and as a Method for Promoting Academic Achievement

Okullarda Şiddeti Engellemede ve Öğrenci Başarısını Sağlamada Kişilik Eğitimi

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Abstract: When violence occurs in schools, the tendency is to apply restrictive and stringent punishments. Recently, studies suggested that promoting safety and prosocial student characteristics may be a viable strategy to prevent school violence. In particular, character education may serve as a method of prevention of aggression in schools. This article will review the literature on character education and explore how character education programs could influence learning and achievement in schools and promote learning and achievement.

Keywords: Character education, violence, achievement, prevention

Özet: Okullarda şiddet çoğu zaman sınırlayıcı ve sert cezalarla kaşılanır. En son çalışmalar güvenlik ve prososyal öğrenci özelliklerini desteklemenin okuldaki şiddeti önlemede başarılı bir strateji olduğunu göstermektedir. Özellikle, kişilik eğitimi okullardaki şiddeti önlemede yararlı olabilir. Bu çalışma, kişilik eğitimi hakkındaki çalışmaları taramakta ve bu tarz ders programlarının öğrenme, okul başarısı, olumlu öğrenci davranışı gibi istendik davranışlarla olan ilişkisini ortaya koymaktadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Kişilik eğitimi, şiddet, başarı, önleme

Character education is both an old and a new topic. It is old, because, dating back to at least to the classical Greeks, societies have always recognized a great need to shape or guide the development of the character of their youth (Berkowitz & Hoppe, 2009). However, formal or systematic research on this topic is relatively new. This article aims to illustrate how character education could contribute to student's learning and achievement. This article will briefly review the history of character education programs in the United States before discussing how character education could serve in the prevention of school violence while promoting academic achievement. This article concludes with recommendations for implementing character education programs in schools.

Brief review of the History of Character Education

The debate among ethic theorists over moral and character education in the United State dates back to colonial America (Glanzer & Milson, 2006). Once considered as part of religious teaching, moral and character education programs had to be changed when states began passing laws in the early 1800s that separated issues of church and state. Thus, the educational system developed nonsectarian public school policies (Glanzer & Milson, 2006), and character education was adopted by public schools in Massachusetts with the purpose of increasing

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DATA and RESULTS

What is Meant by School Violence?

Violence is generally defined as an intentional structure of behavior in which one person threatens, attempts to damage, or does harm another person. Aggression is generally defined as a form of low-level violence that includes verbal, physical, or gestural behavior that is intended to cause minor physical harm, psychological distress, intimidation, or to induce fear in another (Greene, 2005). What is school violence and what are its consequences? In terms of lawful responsibility, school violence is the violence that occurs on school grounds, on school-supported transportation, and at school-sponsored events. Nevertheless, violence committed on school grounds often derives from conflicts reflected in the society. Thus, the lines are blurred between school and community violence and suggest that school staff should be cognizant of the community and the issues within which a school is positioned. School violence is a community or societal issue (Furlong & Morrison, 2000), and members of the society have good reason to take a vested interest in school-based violence prevention initiatives.

Costs of School Violence

School violence is costly at both individual and societal levels. Costs to the victims are both physical and psychological; including threatened or damage to one's mental health (e.g., depressive symptoms), self identity (e.g., self-worth and self esteem), and ability or desire to learn (Clayton, Ballif-Spanvill, & Hunsaker, 2001). One serious threat to school safety include having unauthorized weapons (e.g., knives or firearms) on school grounds. Weapon carrying has been associated with fighting, vandalism, and heavy drinking (Durant *et al.*, 1997). When school safety is compromised, surveys indicate that students and teachers feel insecure at school and many avoid being at school for their own protection which then compromises school engagement and learning (Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998).

Methods of Reducing School Violence

Back in 1997, over two-thirds of secondary schools had already implemented some form of violence prevention program or were preparing to do so (Price, & Everett, 1997). These methods have included punishment, health education, and random weapons searches (Farrington, 1996).

1. **Punishment**: Expulsion and criminalization are the chief methods for dealing with school violence and weapons possession. Government polices at all levels reflect this punitive, legalistic approach to violence prevention (Elliott, Hamburg, & Williams, 1998).

2. **Health Education**: Educational programs have been implemented with the goal to prevent violence and include enhancing children's social and cognitive functions, fostering prosaic behavior, and improving parental behavior. Many of these programs have had a favorable influence on aggression and antisocial behavior (Samples, & Aber, 1998).

One of the most significant educational programs is character education. For example, The California Department of Education supports incorporating character education into a standards-based educational system in a variety of ways such as providing resources to build and develop character in youth; supports the core values of trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship. The California Department of Education, underscores that character education is a trait of effective schools:

> *Effective schools seek to develop and reinforce character traits, such as caring, citizenship, fairness, respect, responsibility, and trustworthiness, through a systematic approach that includes adult modeling, curriculum integration, a positive school climate, and access to comprehensive guidance and counseling services* (Elementary Makes the Grade! CDE, 1999).

responsible. Further, schools should offer students access to character education as a prevention or intervention strategy before misbehavior or problems occur. Character education could help foster the student's empathy, prosocial skills and social competencies that have been related to academic learning and achievement. Lastly, character education *curriculum* could be supported through media (e.g., graphics or cartoons) that serve to powerfully engage and remind students of the learning objectives of the curriculum.

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