

Evaluating Character Development

51 Tools for
Measuring Success

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About This Book

The scene: A workshop for teachers and administrators on developing and implementing a framework for character education at the school site.

The question: “If we implement a character education program, how will we know if our efforts will pay off?” This is the first of my “frequently asked questions”. The other four are:

“How do we find the time to do character education?”

“What program do you recommend?”

“Whose values are we to teach?”

“How do we do it?”

As you know, no two schools are the same, even in the same school area. All schools have their own “personality”. So to account for the variation in schools, and thus their character education efforts, this book offers guidelines and principles about character education evaluation at the school site.

The book is designed to meet the needs of readers, like you, who want to evaluate character education efforts and need some direction. It is for educators who want to be responsible for character education assessment and accountability. It includes ideas, suggestions and examples of ways to evaluate specific elements of character education efforts. It provides you and other character education leaders, whether an individual or a group, with step-by-step ways to focus on self-evaluation using inventories, questionnaires, surveys, focus groups, scales, checklists and other evaluation strategies for data collection and decision making. Some of the material in this book may have to be adapted to meet the unique situational factors at your school.

Audience This book is intended for teachers, administrators and character education committees at the school site. My purpose is to help school-site personnel evaluate their character education efforts. My focus is on you—the teacher, the principal, parents and students, the support staff and the school’s character education evaluation committee who on a daily basis work diligently to model your school’s core values.

I hope P-12 teachers, administrators, counsellors and parent-leaders also find it valuable and useful.

Is Too—Is Not!

While this book provides valuable information about evaluating character education at the school site, it is not all-inclusive. It will not make you (or the committee) an evaluation expert. To paraphrase Daniel Stufflebeam: For school personnel at a school site who want to evaluate their own work and efforts, my opinion is that evaluation is best looked at, not necessarily as a way to prove something, but to improve something.¹

Evaluation of character education, broadly defined, is to assess its worth and merit and to collect and use information for helping realise the goals of the school's character education initiatives. This book will start you on the evaluation journey and take you a few kilometres down the road. It will help you appreciate the need for, the importance of, and the "power" of character education evaluation. It is designed to encourage evaluation and promote its worth. It offers examples and ideas that will help you and your colleagues determine what works, what doesn't and what has to be changed in your efforts to enhance the character of students at your school.

This book may be the beginning for establishing standards for a school's character education efforts. Some of the instruments are standards-driven, but they use synonyms for words such as principles and guidelines. It is clear in this age of school accountability that someone or some group will ask you and your colleagues to justify (account for) the time and energy spent trying to develop the character of students at the school. The data generated by the instruments in this book might help in your accountability efforts. They will certainly inform the processes and programmatic initiatives that are used in your school.

Design

Conversations with professionals, some experts, and many teachers and administrators about character education at the school site have led me to believe that the best way to help them is to try to answer five essential evaluation questions asked of me time and time again:

- What should we evaluate?
- When should we evaluate?
- Who should do the evaluation?
- How should we evaluate?
- What do we do with the results?

I usually add a sixth question: Why do it? This book is designed to answer these questions.

In Part I, you will read my views and assumptions about evaluating character education under Evaluation Suggestions. Practical, easy-to-use Evaluation Strategies are found in Part II. Each one is an SES—a sample evaluation strategy.

The book concludes with resources (more instruments and readings) for your school's character education library.

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Section 1

Organisation and Administration

It should be clear by now that there must be a committee responsible for implementing, maintaining and evaluating character development efforts at the school site. The size of the school (i.e. the number of personnel) will determine the number of committees to be created to do the school's character education work. In some large schools, there may be three committees—a character education council, a character education partnership committee and a character education evaluation committee—the latter two reporting to the council. In moderate-size schools, there may be only two committees. In smaller schools, one committee will be responsible for leading and managing all of the school's character education initiatives.

The framework below is recommended for your school's character education evaluation committee (CEEC). It may serve as useful template. The questions in this evaluation strategy should be reviewed throughout the year to guide discussion and action plans.

Part II: Sample Evaluation Strategies (SES)

Section 2

Mission and Values

The foundation of an effective organization [is] its mission and values.

Ken Blanchard and Mark O'Connor, *Managing by Values*

...They've been told not to put anything in the mission statement...that isn't "measurable." So they shy away from things like character education.... We just need to stretch our vocabulary from "measurable" to "observable."

Edie Holcomb, *Getting Excited About Data*

Dreams are missions. Missions are ideals that guide behaviour, actions and practices. An organisation's mission and values tells what it's all about. Major businesses "live or die" by their mission statements and values (ethical practices). All effective character education programs have a clear vision of where they want to go, what they want to do and why. This vision is made clear to all in a mission statement that is shared, used and assessed.

A good model for a mission statement is the following, which has award-winning character education initiatives in place.

Our mission, as the leader of an educational partnership with the community, is to ensure that all students acquire the knowledge and skills to succeed and contribute as ethical, responsible citizens in a rapidly changing global society through a challenging, comprehensive program taught in a safe, caring environment by exceptional staff with continued involvement of families.

We believe that the morally mature person habitually:

- *Respects human dignity.*
- *Demonstrates active responsibility for the welfare of others.*
- *Integrates individual interests and social responsibilities.*
- *Demonstrates integrity.*
- *Applies moral principles when making choices and judgments.*
- *Seeks peaceful resolution of conflict.*

(See Readings: H. Huffman, p.51.)

Section 3

Expectations and Outcomes

In its broadest sense, the word outcomes, in the context of evaluation, means determining the expectations stake holders have for the school's character education efforts and the student behaviours they are looking for. It means that stake holders meet head on the following questions:

- Why do we want a character education program?
- What do we want this school's character education mission to be?
- What are our programmatic expectations?
- What changes in the school culture do we want?
- What outcomes do we desire?
- What do we expect of our students and their parents?
- What expectations do we have for school personnel?
- Do we have expectations for community agencies, institutions, organisations, groups and individuals?

These and other questions will guide stake holders' evaluation efforts. They will serve as reference points throughout the evaluation process, and they will be the benchmarks against which character education efforts will be compared.

In this section of the framework, we will look at outcomes through several lenses. The sample evaluation strategies will ask stake holders about school climate and student behaviours. Their perceptions will be solicited, and recommendations for establishing baseline data will be offered. The CEEC should also examine the instruments and readings recommended at the end of this book as the committee attempts to assess the impact of the school's character education initiatives on school climate and student behaviours.

Part II: Sample Evaluation Strategies (SES)

Section 4

Curriculum and Programs

The hallmark of a successful organization is a shared sense among its members about what they are trying to accomplish. Agreed-upon goals and ways to attain them enhance the organization's capacity for rational planning and action.

Susan Rosenholtz, *Teacher's Workplace: The Social Organization of Schools*

Consider a school where teachers know exactly what essential skills and knowledge students should learn that year and where they know that their colleagues are teaching to the same manageable standards.

Mike Schmoker & Robert Marzano, "Realizing the Promise of Standards-based Education." *Educational Leadership*

Imagine this scenario in your school. Everyone knows why there is a character education program. Everyone is working collaboratively to accomplish its goals. Stake holders are actively and cooperatively engaged in developing and implementing programs that promote the core virtues and other aspects of the character education program. Consider the appropriateness of program standards that can guide such efforts.

Before looking at a program-standard evaluation checklist, it is necessary to define program. In this checklist, program means the curriculum, co-curriculum, units, lessons, the virtue-a-month plan, service learning and teachable moments. It includes school-wide activities such as assemblies and celebrations. Parent and community programs are part of the definition, as are commercial programs and intervention programs.

Part II: Sample Evaluation Strategies (SES)

Section 5

Instruction

We worry about what's going into them [students] in the way of curriculum, standards, and incentives, and we worry even more about what comes out, that is, how they score and perform. But we virtually ignore their thoughts and feelings about school.

Eric Schaps, "How Students Experience Their Schools", *Education Week*

Research and best practices tell us that there are instructional strategies that teachers use to enhance the character development of students and to teach the school's core values. These strategies answer the often-asked question, "How do I teach character in my classroom?"

There is so much that can be said about instruction and there is so much that can be evaluated that the best that can be done here is to provide the school's character education evaluation committee with a small sample of possibilities. Many instructional strategies are implied in the items of the instruments that follow.

Part II: Sample Evaluation Strategies (SES)

Section 7

Evaluation

In this last section of the book, which I hope you find to be a useful guide on your evaluation journey, the focus will be on evaluation principles and practices. The Character Education Partnership (CEP) offers eleven principles of character education. Three character education experts—Thomas Lickona, Eric Schaps and Cathy Lewis—wrote the CEP guide. These experts suggest that the eleven principles are essential to any school or area’s character education initiatives. Therefore, a school’s Character Education Evaluation Committee should review, or rather study, these guidelines carefully and use them as evaluative methods of determining program effectiveness.

This section, then, has three suggested evaluation strategies that use one or all of these eleven principles. These three strategies are followed by two instruments—one used by a school area, another used by a middle school. This section ends with an “organiser” that the school’s Character Education Evaluation Committee should use to assess its current and future evaluation plans.