

BOOK REVIEW

The Case for Character Education: A Developmental Approach, by Alan L. Lockwood (2009), New York, NY: Teachers College Press. ISBN: 978-0-8077-4923-4

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Character education in public schools has had a long and contested history in the United States. While it is undeniable that schools and teachers have always played a role in morally preparing students for life, determining the best way to accomplish this goal is the age old question for character education advocates. The preferred method for character education in public schools has continually transformed and evolved based on changing demographics, social and political influences, new research or theories, and a variety of other reasons. Alan Lockwood addresses the classic debate regarding appropriate character education programs and methods in contemporary society in his book, *The Case for Character Education: A Developmental Approach*. Specifically, Lockwood discusses some of the shortcomings of

contemporary character education and offers a developmental approach for overcoming these perceived pitfalls. Although many critics will argue over the legitimacy of the author's assessed problems with contemporary character education and thus be tempted to discount his subsequent solutions, the ideas and issues brought forth by Lockwood should certainly add to the ongoing academic discourse regarding the nature and future of character education.

Lockwood begins his book with the very difficult task of trying to establish a working definition for contemporary character education. This is perhaps the most controversial aspect of Lockwood's writing. While the author is correct in asserting that the vast array of materials, programs, and organizations deal-

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ing directly with character education make its meaning hard to define, his established definition is based primarily on the work of three men; Thomas Lickona, Kevin Ryan, and Edward Wynne. Although these three men are without question some of the most influential individuals of the contemporary character education movement, most of their work cited throughout this book is quite outdated. In fact, one might contend that the very definition for contemporary character education offered by Lockwood is itself outdated, as it is cited in his work from 1997. The criticism that many contemporary character education advocates may impose is that Lockwood's interpretation of "contemporary" does not take into account changes in the field from the last 12 years, especially considering the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act and how a series of disasters (e.g., the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the student massacre at Columbine High School in 1999) have once again placed character education programs in the national spotlight. However, upon carefully reading Lockwood's rationale for defining contemporary character education throughout chapter one, it is clear that he is quite aware of new research and approaches in this field, but yet he selectively chooses programs and publications to build his assault. For instance, it is particularly ironic that Lockwood makes no reference to the *Eleven Principles of Effective Character Education* (2007) or the model for *Smart and Good High Schools* (2005), both of which are coauthored by Lickona. What makes this exclusion so puzzling is the fact that Lickona's work from the 1990s is cited several times, while his most recent writings that represent a more enlightened conception of character education are ignored. Perhaps a discussion of these newer works would have created a more formidable opponent to Lockwood's notion of contemporary character education and strengthened his criticisms on the fundamental issues with its theory and practice.

Chapters 2 and 3 center around the criticisms of contemporary character education

and how Lockwood thinks contemporary advocates should respond to these criticisms. Regardless of whether the reader agrees or disagrees with Lockwood's definition of contemporary character education, the problems he identifies and discusses throughout chapter two should be given considerable thought to all stakeholders and decision makers in the field of character education. One of the first problems analyzed is the contemporary character education advocates overall dreary view of human nature and how character failings are blamed for social disorder, school violence, or any other community labeled deviant behavior. Lockwood points out how many contemporary advocates do not seriously take into consideration the social, economic, and political environments that enable certain behaviors to occur. Also under attack are the contemporary advocates view, use, and definitions of values. Lockwood criticizes his opponents' views of values for being "overly simplistic" (p. 16) and also questions how contemporary advocates deal with value conflicts that inevitably arise in social situations. The final two major criticisms of contemporary character education discussed are the psychological assumptions (how values influence behavior and how values are best taught) and the absence of any research based conception regarding human development in character education theory and practice. The author does a thorough job in explaining the details of all the aforementioned problems, as well as offering potential responses to his criticisms in chapter three. This section of the book is important because it reveals to the reader Lockwood's true motive for writing this book, program improvement through critical dialogue (p. 34). His criticisms are meant to be thoughtful considerations for contemporary character education advocates to address in order to advance the effectiveness of character education. In short, chapter three is about Lockwood taking the position of contemporary character education advocates and trying to address the problems laid out earlier in his book, an effort that ultimately transitions into

the second half of the book regarding the formation of a developmental approach to character education.

The majority of this book is dedicated to the formation of a developmental approach to character education in order to improve the effectiveness of contemporary programs. Lockwood uses the work of developmental psychologists such as Erik Erickson, Jean Piaget, and Lawrence Kohlberg to construct his rationale for the developmental approach to character education. The synthesizing of developmental psychologists works enables Lockwood to build a well informed, research based theoretical framework for his new approach to character education. While the theory of the developmental approach is sound, the highlight of this approach may be the practice of developmental character education. These practical implications provide educators and policymakers with a generic blueprint of how this approach should be used in character education programs and lessons. Lockwood discusses how this section of the book is not designed to be a detailed methods text of developmental teaching strategies, but instead his thoughts are provided so that curriculum developers and teachers can create their own meaningful lessons based on his conception of character education. This section is particularly useful in redefining or refocusing the role of teachers in character education and the role that student discussions

and analysis of values should play in contemporary character education lessons. The overall theory, rationale, and framework for Lockwood's developmental approach to character education clearly provides current and future educators with a strong basis for improving some of the most fundamental problems with contemporary character education theory and practice. Whether the reader chooses to agree or disagree with Lockwood's assessment of contemporary character education or his recommendations for improvement through the developmental approach; his ideas laid out in *The Case for Character Education: A Developmental Approach* should certainly be at the forefront of discussions surrounding the improvement of character education in the twenty-first century.

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