

“... it is next to impossible to separate the teaching of values from schooling itself; it is a part of schooling whether people are willing to acknowledge it or not. The question ... is how the educator can influence students’ character development effectively so that the impact is positive.”

– Williams 2000, p. 34

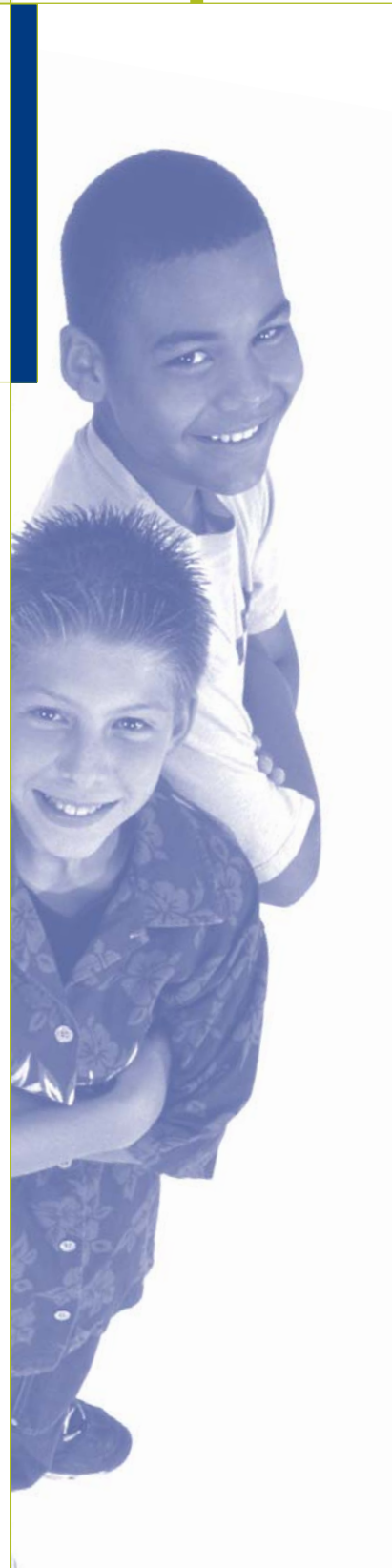
**T**he primary responsibility for character and citizenship development lies with parents and families, but schools play an essential supportive role. Whether they are conscious of it or not, schools are involved in teaching cultural and societal mores and values, and in shaping students’ ideas about what constitutes good behaviour. Schools help students to develop civic responsibility, healthy attitudes towards themselves and others, and a commitment to lifelong learning.

Often we think of learning as consisting entirely of academic skills and knowledge, but character and citizenship are the foundation of learning. For this reason, Alberta’s *Guide to Education* highlights key skills, knowledge and attitudes related to character and citizenship that schools are expected to teach and model for children, including the skills and attitude to pursue learning throughout their lives, and an understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.<sup>1</sup>

In addition, students completing high school are expected to:

- respect the cultural diversity and common values of Canada
- demonstrate desirable personal characteristics, such as respect, responsibility, fairness, honesty, caring, loyalty and commitment to democratic ideals.<sup>2</sup>

One way to achieve these outcomes is through character and citizenship education. Character and citizenship education is a deliberate effort to cultivate civility, ethical behaviours, self-management skills and personal attributes that our society values in its school graduates, community members and employees. It represents a consensus on certain attributes or core values such as respect, responsibility, fairness, empathy and self-discipline that transcend socioeconomic and cultural lines. Character and citizenship education nurtures these attributes in an explicit, intentional, focused and systematic manner by promoting, modelling, teaching, expecting, celebrating and consciously practising them in everyday actions.



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Character and citizenship education is an inclusive concept regarding all aspects of how school communities can support the positive character development of students, staff and other school stakeholders. It is woven throughout the school day for all students and is integrated into the curriculum, discipline policies, and co- and extracurricular activities.

All schools are doing some form of character and citizenship education, although these efforts may not be explicitly called character and citizenship initiatives. For example, comprehensive programs such as those of The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, Lions-Quest and Effective Behaviour Supports are all forms of character and citizenship education.

*For an overview of sample approaches to support character and citizenship education, see Appendix A.*

The sample approaches discussed in the appendix include:

- Caring Relationships (Noddings)
- Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Lickona)
- Circles of Courage (Reclaiming Youth at Risk—Brendtro, Brokenleg and Van Bockern)
- Community of Caring (Kennedy Foundation)
- Comprehensive School Health Approach
- Developmental Assets (Search Institute)
- Effective Behaviour Supports
- Emotional Intelligence (Goleman)
- Habits of Mind (Costa)
- Hope Research (Hope Foundation of Alberta)
- Lions-Quest Canada/Thrive!
- Moral Intelligence (Borba)
- Professional Learning Communities (DuFour et al.)
- Resiliency Research
- Safe and Caring Schools Initiative
- Skillstreaming: New Strategies and Perspectives for Teaching Prosocial Skills (Goldstein and McGinnis)
- Virtues Program (Popov, Popov and Kavelin)
- You Can Do It! (Bernard).

## Why We Need Character and Citizenship Education

A growing body of school-based research suggests that character and citizenship education provides significant benefits to students, school culture and the community-at-large. The potential of character and citizenship education, and the key goals that it fosters, include:

- a climate of respect for self and others
- the attributes of active citizenship
- higher academic achievement
- improved interpersonal relationships
- greater self-discipline
- fewer behavioural problems
- a continued focus on safe schools
- a positive school culture
- enhanced employability skills.

Classrooms today represent a microcosm of our rich and diverse society. Alberta schools are dynamic environments that emphasize high standards, and respect and safety, but we cannot take this for granted. A continuous focus on positive character attributes can help build classrooms where students are ready to learn and teachers are able to teach.

At the same time, the education of students contributes not only to their personal development and opportunities, but also to their ability to fulfill social and economic potential as a province and as a people. Character and citizenship education contributes to the development of conscientious community members and responsible citizens.

In faith-based schools and programs, character and citizenship education is a synthesis of faith and culture, and is often built on gospel values.

Effective character and citizenship education provides school communities with an understanding and a framework for practising core values in daily living that will actively shape future society.

## Purpose of This Resource

This resource is based on the work and efforts of many education partners including The Society for Safe and Caring Schools and Communities, the Alberta School Boards Association, the Alberta Teachers' Association and the College of Alberta School Superintendents. It is also a response to recommendation #5 from Alberta's Commission on Learning (2003) on expecting clear outcomes and values. The report affirms that "... schools play an important role, along with parents and community members, in modelling and reinforcing essential values and preparing students to be productive and contributing citizens" (p. 51).

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This resource provides schools and jurisdictions with a sample framework and strategies for developing and/or supporting a culture of character and citizenship. The framework encourages individual schools to assess and put action plans in place to improve their cultures. It also looks at how character and citizenship education can be supported by administrators, school staff, parents, students, school jurisdictions and the larger community. It supports safe and caring schools. This resource may be especially helpful to leadership teams who are working collaboratively to make character and citizenship an integral part of school culture.

## Understanding Character Education

In recent years, there has been increasing attention to the necessity of educating for character. However, there is also increasing debate over what character education is and how it should be represented in school curricula. Critics argue that schools or teachers should not impose values on students and question whether ‘knowing’ what good behaviour is guarantees its practice.

Many theorists, educators and community members now agree on the necessity of educating for character and citizenship. Some suggest schools and teachers always influence student character, whether or not they teach values explicitly. Debate about appropriateness and effectiveness of various approaches continues.

It is important that the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values students are expected to learn guide decisions about character and citizenship education initiatives. What knowledge should be taught? What skills should be developed? What perspectives should be considered? What values should be upheld? In other words, what does it mean to have “good character?”

## Conceptions of Character

“Good character consists of knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good ...”

– Lickona 1991, p. 51

Much of the debate about whether and how to teach for character is tied into a debate about what “character” means. Character can refer to:

- personality traits or virtues such as responsibility and respect for others
- emotions such as guilt or sympathy
- social skills such as conflict management or effective communication

- behaviours such as sharing or helping, or
- cognitions such as belief in equality or problem-solving strategies.

One useful definition is offered by Thomas Lickona, who describes character as “a reliable inner disposition to respond to situations in a morally good way. Character so conceived has three interrelated parts: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral behaviour” (1991, p. 51).

One of the most debated issues in character education is whether or not there are such things as universal values or virtues that determine good character. During the last several decades, many schools and teachers did not want to teach character education because they felt that values were always contextual and could not be taught as absolutes. While some people still agree with this position, others argue that there are indeed values that are universal in the sense that most people in all major cultures around the world would agree that values are important for a positive, functioning society. Schools and/or jurisdictions need to identify and agree on their own set of core values.

From a faith-based perspective, it is character modelled on gospel values that gives stability and enables individuals to embrace life and act in the right way. Character is built on virtue. Character education gives students the moral bearings on which to make right decisions and to behave morally.

## Understanding Citizenship Education

As with character education, our conceptions of what citizenship education is are changing as our understandings of citizenship are expanding. In a traditional conception of citizenship education, the purpose was to produce loyal and dutiful citizens. As understandings of citizenship expand to address issues such as human rights, language, nationalism, globalization, equality, multiculturalism and pluralism, citizenship education is becoming more centred on the concept of inclusion and respect for diversity. More recently, citizenship education began explicitly recognizing the role of developing skills and processes. Strategies such as inquiry, literature studies and case studies develop the cognitive and critical-thinking skills associated with active and participatory citizenship.<sup>3</sup>

## Conceptions of Citizenship

Most experts agree that citizenship involves a number of interrelated skills, beliefs and actions. Osborne identifies five elements that constitute citizenship and that influence outcomes typically represented in curriculum. These elements are described in the chart on the following page.<sup>4</sup>

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## Elements of Citizenship

National consciousness or identity	Political literacy	Observance of rights and duties	Values	General intellectual skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of identity as a national citizen</li> <li>• Awareness of multiple identities, such as regional, cultural, ethnic, religious, class, gender</li> <li>• Sense of global or world citizenship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowledge of the political, legal and social institutions of one's country</li> <li>• Understanding of key political and social issues</li> <li>• Necessary skills and knowledge for effective political participation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding and belief in basic rights and duties of citizenship</li> <li>• Understanding of how to deal with, and if possible resolve, conflicts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding of societal values</li> <li>• Knowledge and skills to deal with conflicting values in acceptable ways</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Literacy and intellectual competence</li> </ul>

In Osborne's view, global citizenship is part of national identity, in which students come to see themselves as members of a world community and learn to balance the claims of nation against claims that transcend national boundaries.<sup>4</sup>

Westheimer delineates three categories of citizenship—moving across a continuum from individually-centred action to decisions motivated by a recognition of the issues and problems of the broader society.<sup>5</sup>

	Personally Responsible Citizen	Participatory Citizen	Justice-oriented Citizen
<b>Examples</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acts responsibly in the community</li> <li>• Works and pays taxes</li> <li>• Obeys laws</li> <li>• Picks up litter, recycles and gives blood</li> <li>• Helps those in need, lends a hand during times of crisis</li> <li>• Contributes time, money or both to charitable causes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognizes the importance of participation</li> <li>• Organizes community efforts to care for those in need, promote economic development or clean up environment</li> <li>• Actively participates in civic affairs and social life of the community at local, provincial and national levels</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critically assesses social, political and economic structures</li> <li>• Explores strategies for change that address root causes of problems</li> <li>• Knows about social movements and how to effect systemic change</li> <li>• Seeks out and addresses areas of injustice</li> </ul>

# Relationship Between Character and Citizenship Education

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Traditionally, educating for citizenship in Alberta schools has always been linked, in one way or another, to character.<sup>6</sup> The link between citizenship and character education can be characterized as one of perspective and scope. Citizenship education recognizes the need for attributes and virtues—respect, responsibility, fairness, honesty, caring, loyalty and commitment to democratic ideals. Character education recognizes that commitment and responsibility to community and a democratic society are part of what constitutes ‘good character.’ However, while citizenship education has traditionally been more concerned with individuals’ participation in their communities, nation and the global world, character education has been more centred on individuals’ development. This relationship is illustrated in the following graphic representation.

### The Relationship Between Character and Citizenship Education



As citizenship education has received more attention from educators and the public, the link between citizenship and character education has become more explicit and more contentious. Expanding understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of citizenship has implications for the way we define and make pedagogical decisions about character education in schools. To what extent is citizenship considered to be a value, to be developed the same way that values such as honesty and fairness are developed? Or is character education a role of educating for citizenship, one that implies that values are the foundation for any citizenship program?

Although the values identified in many character education resources can be considered essential for the well-being of individuals and society, they are not distinguishing or exclusive traits of citizens in a democracy.

As citizenship education grapples with ways to teach that respect an individual’s multiple identities and affiliations, and character education recognizes the importance of an individual’s interactions in and affiliations to communities and society, the lines between citizenship and character education are increasingly blurred. There is also an increasing recognition that character and citizenship education must reach beyond an emphasis on character traits and attributes as the

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sole focus and consider how to foster critical thinking, decision making and participation in one's own learning as well as in society. A greater focus is being placed on developing character and citizenship in the context of schools as communities of learning. While the empirical research on schools as communities is still quite limited, the findings are consistent in suggesting that there are a wide range of benefits for students and teachers who experience their schools in this way.<sup>7</sup>

The *What Works Clearinghouse* is currently doing a systematic review of evidence on the benefits of comprehensive schoolwide character education interventions. For more information, visit their Web site at [www.w-w-c.org/comingnext/character.html](http://www.w-w-c.org/comingnext/character.html).

## Endnotes

1. Alberta Education 2004, p. iii.
2. Ibid., p. 2.
3. Shields with Ramsey 1998.
4. Adapted with permission from Kenneth Osborne et al., "Citizenship Education: An Introduction to Citizenship Education," *The Centre for Canadian Studies at Mount Allison University*, 1999, [www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian\\_studies/english/about/multimedia/citizenship/page\\_01.html](http://www.mta.ca/faculty/arts/canadian_studies/english/about/multimedia/citizenship/page_01.html) (Accessed December 1, 2001), pp. 1, 2. Material prepared by the About Canada Project at the Centre for Canadian Studies, Mount Allison University.
5. Adapted with permission from Joel Westheimer, "Citizenship Education for a Democratic Society," *Teach Magazine* (March–April 2003), pp. 18, 19.
6. von Heyking 1998.
7. Roberts, Hom and Battistich 1995.